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# The Cruise of the Pelican

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

*Author of "The Kanchi Gate," "Spectator of the Gate," etc.*

## THE CRUISE OF THE "PELICAN"

London: NURST & BLACKETT, LTD.,

RAVENHURST HOUSE, E.C.





# *The Cruise of the Pelican*

By H. BEDFORD-JONES - *Author of*

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London : HURST & BLACKETT, LTD.,  
PATERNOSTER HOUSE, E.C.



# The Cruise of the "Pelican"

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## CHAPTER I

### BOATSWAIN JOE

Tom Dennis sat on a printer's stool beside a very dirty window which dimly illumined his figure, and stared at the gloom surrounding him. His rawboned face was dejected; his angular body slumped despondently. In his hand was a little sheaf of papers.

It was five-thirty in the afternoon. Long since, the grist of evening papers had gone through the big press; the rollers had been washed and retired; the men had gone home. It was Saturday night, and the week's work



was done. So was *The Marshville Clarion*, as Tom Dennis cheerlessly admitted to himself.

The high-school lad who assisted Dennis in gathering local items and filling the columns of *The Clarion* had not returned as usual from the Saturday baseball game to write up his notes from a fresh memory. Dennis had instructed him not to return until Monday—and not to return then unless sent for.

Silence and the darkness of departing day lay funereally upon the big back room. Presses and stones and type-racks filled the floor. Always dingy and dark, this room now seemed to feel the approach of dissolution. The smell of printing-ink hung upon the air like incense strewn by dead hands. *The Clarion* had issued its own obituary.

Tom Dennis suddenly moved. To the dim light of the unwashed window he held the papers in his hand. They were bills. Each of them was stamped "Paid". As

he looked at them, Tom Dennis uttered a mirthless bitter laugh.

"Paid!" he said, his voice ringing hollowly in the emptiness of the big back room. "Paid, by heavens—and not a cent to spare! And the bank holds a mortgage on this plant! I can sell the typewriters for fifty dollars; I'll have to do it to get out of town!"

The outer door, the door of the front office, banged, and there was a heavy tread that ceased abruptly. Tom Dennis paid no heed to it; he sensed that someone had entered, but it was of no concern to him what passed in the outer office.

"Done!" he said morosely. "I'm done! It's been the dickens of a pull, this year has—and now I'm done."

He was right: he was done, and he knew it.

Every newspaper man dreams of running, some day, a paper all his own, dreams of

taking over some "small-town" paper, dreams of running it his own way and indulging his own ideas of how a paper should be run, dreams of wealth and fame in consequence. Once in a thousand cases, perhaps, the dream comes true.

Tom Dennis was at the end of his own particular dream. A college man, a star reporter on a Chicago daily, he had saved his money, and, at twenty-three, had become the owner of *The Clarion* in the sleepy little town of Marshville.

A meteoric year had ensued. Tom Dennis had gone to work to wake up Marshville—and he had succeeded. He had wakened Marshville to a lively animosity, a deadly resentment that a stranger should come in here and give advice. Marshville knew that it was a sleepy, dying, vicious, ingrowing little town—and Marshville wanted to be just that kind of town! So, when Tom Dennis tried to root out the viciousness and decay, Marshville was angered.

Six months passed, and the last of Tom Dennis' money was gone. He mortgaged the whole property, lock, stock, and barrel, and went on fighting. He had gleams of success, and the letters of Florence Hathaway had inspired him to renewed efforts, but now the end had come. He must either borrow on his personal credit, which was not extensive enough to carry him very long, or else go under.

"A smart Yankee packet lay out in the bay,  
To me *way* hay, o-*hi*-o!  
A-waiting for a fair wind to get under way,  
A *long* time ago!"

The voice—a musing rumbling voice—came from the outer office, and it was a voice strange to Tom Dennis. But he scarce heard the words, or the swinging air. His hand had clenched upon the sheaf of papers, and his head had lowered. Chin to breast, he was in the agony of defeat; despite himself, despite his rugged features, slow tears were groping on his cheeks.



Those tears were not for himself, not for the fact of his failure here. A year ago Tom Dennis would have taken his defeat with a laugh and a joke, and he had not changed. It was not self-misery which drew those man's tears to his cheeks.

He was thinking of Florence Hathaway. He had found her here in the *Clarion* office a year ago, a society reporter; she was then supporting her slowly-dying mother. Two years previously her father, Captain Miles Hathaway, had been lost at sea somewhere in the Pacific; the girl had brought her mother back to Marshville, the mother's old home town, and there the mother had died. This had been three months after the coming of Tom Dennis.

For another three months, Florence Hathaway had stayed on with the *Clarion*—largely for love of Tom Dennis. Then had come the offer of a teacher's position in a private school in Chicago, and she had accepted the offer.

Not that Dennis wanted her to accept—far from it! They had argued it all out that night, under the willow trees by the river. Her hand in his, the girl had made Tom Dennis face a few hard facts. She was the rare kind who can make a man realize things.

"Tom, dear," she had said gently, "another year will see you firmly established here in Marshville. Until then we can't dare marry; it isn't fair to you! Get clear of financial worries first. Not that I care about the money, Tom, but I do care so much about you; and now you're talking about mortgaging the paper, and it's bearing you down."

"And if I fail?"

"Then come to me in Chicago, and we'll start fresh—together."

"But why go there? Stay here where you can help me most! It's your society stuff that does most good——"

"No, dear, Marshville hates you; you

must conquer or be conquered, and you don't know how terribly bitter Marshville can be. It's like any small town, Tom. They're all against you now, and if I stay on the paper, they'll be talking—about us. Besides, I don't like the place. I want to be in Chicago a little while, mistress of myself, enjoying a little bit of real life and real things. I'll come back to you here, or you'll come to me there, Tom, and——"

Now, as he sat in the dingy back room, Tom Dennis thought over these things, and his pride revolted within him. He could not go back to his old job, admitting that he had made a failure of his paper, admitting that he was good for nothing better than a reporter's job. He could not go to Florence Hathaway—a failure! He had tasted of freedom, and now it seemed to him that a reporter's was a dog's life. He would not go back to it. He would not ask her to face it all, even though she might be willing—

" We didn't get a drink for seventeen days,  
To me *way* hay, o-*hi*-o!  
And nobody cared if she hung in stays,  
A *long* time ago!"

Dimly the words penetrated the consciousness of Tom Dennis, roused him slightly. Who was in the outer office? Well, no matter. The bank owned it now—tight-lipped old banker Dribble up the street, who owned everything.

"It wasn't a fair fight, maybe," muttered Tom Dennis, sudden storm in his eyes. "They lied to me right and left. The advertising contracts were faked on me. They tried to stab me in the back whenever they had a chance—and they did it, too! But there's no use sobbing over all that."

He would have to leave town, of course—the sooner the better. He might as well take the evening train to Chicago and make his plans to start afresh. There was nothing to hold him here; everything was paid, even to the interest on the mortgage. The



mortgage still had six months to run.

"Why not?" Dennis suddenly came to his feet. "I can shut up this coop, and they can't touch it for six months! The property may deteriorate, of course; mice will eat the rollers, and the ink will dry up, and the presses won't be oiled—but that's old Dribble's lookout, not mine! I still have six months left! A stroke of luck——"

"Ahoy, matey!" billowed a voice. "Ahoy, Dennis! Where are you, skipper?"

A monstrous voice was that, a roaring thunderous voice that filled the dingy old back room with rolling waves of sound. Startled, Tom Dennis reached to the nearest electric bulb, switched it on, and directed the light toward the door of the outer office.

There, standing in the doorway, he saw a surprising figure. The stranger was two inches taller than Dennis, who himself stood six feet one. Not particularly well dressed was the intruder—rough blue serge, manifestly hand-me-downs, and a white soft shirt

with loosely-knotted cravat. But the face—the face was the thing!

A peculiar face it was, for in it was emphasized the trait common to most men. Its left side was regular enough. The right brow, however, was uptwisted satanically; the right side of the mouth was down-twisted in a leer. Seldom had Tom Dennis seen this dissimilarity between the two sides of a man's face so pronounced. Aside from this, it was a massive strong face, lighted by two very direct, piercing, predatory eyes of light-blue, and crowned by flaming red hair.

"Ha!" said the stranger, coming forward. "You're Dennis?"

"You're right." And a sour smile twisted the lips of the newspaper man. "My name is Dennis, right enough. You've got another bill to present?"

The other halted, and stared at him.

"Bill?" he repeated. "Bill? Paying your bills, are you?"

Dennis laughed shortly. "You bet. I'm clearing out of here to-night. Well, how much is it? Guess I can scrape up enough to pay it; if not, there's a typewriter out in front you can take along. Thought I'd cleared 'em all off, though——"

The stranger threw back his head and laughed. That laugh was a roaring billow of sound, as though the red-head were accustomed to fling his laughter into the teeth of a singing gale.

"Ho-ho!" he cried boisterously. "Slipping your cable, hey? Gone under, hey? Another poor swab who can't beat the shyster law-clerks and has gone under! Well, do what I did, matey. I was in the same boat myself, oncet—and I run off to sea! Strike me blind if it wasn't the makin' of me! Now, if you'll take my advice and do the same thing——"

"What do you want?" snapped Dennis suddenly. "I'm not asking for your advice, my friend. Have you business with me?"

"Aye." The other came forward, hand extended. His voice was conciliating. "Come, no harm done by a bit o' fun, matey! None intended, none took. My name's Ericksen; they calls me Boatswain Joe, mostly, though I've got a quarter-master's ticket in me oilskin. I want a bit o' talk, if you have the time."

"I'm rich in time," responded Dennis. "Take a seat."

As they shook hands, Dennis felt the palm of Ericksen to be horny, rough with great calluses; but the thumb lay over the back of his own fingers with smooth pressure. A sailor, then, and one used to handling lines! That explained the odd snatches of lingo. But what was a sailor doing here, in the middle of the United States?

Ericksen eased himself up on a high stool, stuffed loose tobacco from his pocket into a pipe-bowl and struck a match. His



piercing, arrogant, light-blue eyes surveyed Tom Dennis with a comprehensive scrutiny.

"I hear," he said abruptly, a cloud of smoke issuing from his lips, "I hear you and Miss Hathaway are engaged to be married."

His voice was still conciliatory, rather bearing an air of a forced whine, and it was entirely belied by those fierce predatory eyes. Tom Dennis flushed angrily.

"What are you driving at?" he demanded. "What have my private affairs to do with you?"

"Don't flare up, matey," responded the other. "I'm comin' to the p'int, steerin' a safe course meantime. 'Keep an eye on your charts, boatswain,' says the skipper, 'and look out for shoals among them land-sharks.' So I'm doin' it. Of course, knowing the inside of the country pretty well, comin' from Wisconsin way like I do, I'm able to navigate better'n the others would be; but just the same, I'm mindin' my wheel mighty

close. 'No steerin' by the wind this cruise,' says the skipper, and right he was."

This was all Greek to Tom Dennis.

"Well, what do you want with me?" he reiterated.

"You answer my question, matey," returned the other calmly.

"None of your business, then," snapped Dennis.

To his surprise, Ericksen only chuckled good-humouredly, and slapped his knee as though at a good joke.

"I knowed it! You are, right enough. Goin' to Chicago to get spliced, maybe?"

The hand of Dennis closed on a printer's key, but Ericksen interposed.

"Here, don't start no rumpus, matey! You see, I got to know the chart before I can lay my course. Ain't that reasonable? I got to this here town this afternoon, lookin' for Miss Hathaway, and first one, then another, tells me she's gone to Chicago, but they don't know exactly where. They

said to come here an' find you, you bein' supposed to know for private reasons. Ain't that statin' it plain and unoffensive? That's me every time. 'Mind your jaw-tackle, boatswain,' says the skipper. 'Be mild an' gentle.' And I am."

The sailor grinned. So cheerful and white-toothed was that grin, that Tom Dennis felt impelled to laugh, but the arrogant, light-blue eyes steadied him.

"You want Miss Hathaway's address—is that it?"

"Part of it, matey," responded Ericksen. "Only part of it!"

## CHAPTER II

### NEWS FROM NOWHERE

Florence Hathaway was extremely astonished when, upon Sunday morning, she heard the voice of Tom Dennis on the telephone, and received a request to join him down-town for noon dinner.

"Come up to the school, Tom!" she returned. "You can dine in hall as my guest. And what brought you to town?"

"Can't talk now, Florence. And I'll have to refuse your invitation—because we'll all three have to dine down-town. Better make it the 'Royton'; then we can have comparative privacy."

"All three?" she echoed. "Who's with you?"

"A man who has news of your father, dear. He's to join us at the 'Royton' at one sharp, but I want to see you for a few



moments first. Why not meet me at the Art Institute about twelve-thirty? I'll be in the Japanese Room. Believe me, it's important!"

"News of—father? Why, yes! I'll be there on time, Tom. Japanese Room!"

So, at the hour when the galleries were totally deserted, Tom Dennis was striding up and down in the Japanese Room, past the cases filled with lacquer ware. In his present mood of frowning meditation, his features looked almost forbidding; they were strong features, rugged with an uncompromising virility. Looking at them, one could understand how this man, unaided, had first worked his way through college and had later gone to the top of an overcrowded profession.

On time almost to the minute, Florence Hathaway appeared. Dennis met her at the door, his hand to hers; a swift glance around, and he bent his lips to hers.

"This way, dear!" he said, turning.

"There'll be no interruptions then."

Together they made their way outside to one of the little balconies overlooking the smoky park and lake front. Brushing off two of the chairs, Tom Dennis set them by the stone rail.

"What on earth is it all about, Tom?" asked the girl wonderingly.

"Me, first—then you," smiling he filled his pipe and lighted it. Then he set about his tale, beginning with his own situation of the previous afternoon, and passing on to the coming of Boatswain Joe. He described his own hopeless case very bluntly and frankly.

Florence Hathaway did not interrupt him, but sat in silence, her eyes fastened upon his rugged face, reading there the signs of his past worries and failure. They were fine eyes, those that dwelt upon him with love and tenderness. An artist might have said that they were too large for her face, that

their glowing brown depths held too passionate a fervor, too calmly poised a radiance, to match her almost colourless cheeks. By no rule could Florence Hathaway be adjudged beautiful; and yet Marshville had missed her more than all its other absent daughters put together.

In her eyes, indeed, lay the brave and tender soul of Florence Hathaway. Frai seemed her slender, almost girlish body; yet one who gazed into her level eyes knew that hers was an indomitable spirit—a heritage perhaps, from that lost father whose iron soul had battled the men and winds and seas of half the world.

"Then you've left Marshville for good?" she asked quietly when Dennis paused.

"Yes." He nodded curtly. "The place will be shut for six months. If I've not returned by that time, if I've not struck some lucky vein, old Dribble can foreclose his mortgage and be blessed! Of course, I'm not gambling on striking it rich in a hurry;

it's just a long chance that still remains. Well, now that's settled, let's get on about your friend Ericksen. You never heard of anyone by that name?"

"No. He may have known my father——"

"I'm coming to that. Ericksen had come from the Pacific Coast to find you—in person; mark that down as Point One, upper case! Why in person, when a letter or telegram would have fetched you? Point One—Query! I don't like that fellow's looks.

"Point Two: he tells a very fishy sort of tale—namely, that your father was not lost at sea at all, but was rescued——"

"What?" broke in the girl, leaning forward. Again Dennis nodded, imperturbable.

"Yes, if you care to believe it. I don't! He says that your father was taken into Unalaska by some natives who had found him on one of the Aleut islands—he was then down with something like what used to be

called 'brain fever'. It left him quite paralysed. He was taken to Vancouver and is now in a sailors' home there. Being paralysed, barely able to keep alive, he has been unable to tell his name—mind you, this is all Boatswain Joe's narrative.

"Ericksen, or some of his friends, saw your father there and recognized him, and promptly took him in charge. Do you get that, Florence? They have him in a house in Vancouver now, taking care of him. Point Two! They are not philanthropists; why did they do this? Why did they not communicate with the authorities? Why do they send Boatswain Joe to get you?"

"To get—me?" The girl's brown eyes shone eagerly.

"Yes. Ericksen wants you to go and see your father, wants you to try to communicate with him. Why? I don't know. Probably your father knows something that Ericksen or his friends want to know. Well, I suppose you'd go quick enough, if you believed the story?"



"Go?" she flashed. "Of course! To-day—now!"

"Ericksen seemed to think you might not," said Dennis dryly. "He offered me a thousand dollars to persuade you to go. I refused to give him your address; we came to Chicago together last night, and I told him you'd meet us for dinner. That's all. Point Three, why did he offer me that money?"

He was silent for a minute, then knocked out his pipe and swung around to face her.

"Look squarely at it, Florence: there's something mighty queer in the wind! Point one: why did Boatswain Joe come in person to get you? Point two: why are his friends taking care of your father? Point three: why do they try to bribe me to persuade you to go? I don't like it."

She gazed at him silently, frowningly.

"I can't answer any of those questions," she said at last, slowly. "But if my father is alive, and in that condition—my place is with him! Let's leave it until we see

this man. He will perhaps have some proofs to offer me. He would have no incentive to tell such a story if it were not true. . . . About yourself, Tom: what do you intend to do now?"

He laughed shortly. "I've scarcely thought about it, Florence; this other thing has been on my mind all night. But I know this: I'll not let you go West in company with that sailor! That's dead sure. If his story is really true, then I'm going along, somehow!"

He glanced at his watch, and rose. "Time! Say nothing definite to Ericksen. Listen to him and form your own conclusions. Make an appointment with him for tomorrow to give him your answer; better make it for the 'Royton' again. Make him agree to pay our expenses West."

"You know I'll not take his money, Tom—on such an errand."

"I will, though." And Dennis laughed. "I'm down to thirty-four dollars! Besides,

I want to see just how readily he'll agree to shell out real money. There's something queer about that crowd's being willing to pay so high to get you to Vancouver!"

"All sailors are generous," said the girl softly. "Perhaps some friends of father's are behind it."

"They didn't telegraph you, did they? Well, we shall see. Anyway—draw him out!"

In silence they regained the corridors, descended the wide staircase, and sought the street. Presently they entered a deserted lobby and gained the elevator running to the restaurant above.

When they stepped out of the car, they found Boatswain Joe awaiting them, manifestly ill at ease, and obviously an object of some suspicion on the part of the restaurant people. Dennis, knowing the head waiter of old, gained a quiet table in a corner and ordered dinner.

He was covertly watching Florence, to

see how she took to the seaman; but she was plainly doing her best to put Ericksen at his ease. Amid these surroundings, he was anything but comfortable. The linen and silver, the table appointments, the orchestra, the general surroundings—all abashed and discomfited him. Tom Dennis grinned to himself, for this was precisely what he had aimed at.

But Boatswain Joe was there for a purpose and lost no time getting about it. Florence Hathaway, too, was wildly eager to authenticate the news of her father, and urged him to tell his story at once. So Ericksen, by the time the soup arrived, was into it full swing and was forgetting his own awkwardness and the girl's presence; bashfulness left him, and he told the story more in detail than he had to Dennis—perhaps under the spell of those glowing brown eyes.

And Dennis, studying the man, realized

that Ericksen was no fool. He had guessed as much from the twisted lines of the face. Now, the more he listened, the more Dennis felt that Boatswain Joe had been well chosen for his present errand. The man presented the story of Captain Hathaway with a simplicity which carried conviction.

"So, ma'am, the skipper and the missus are takin' care of him," he concluded. "The skipper says to me: 'If the lady wants proof, boatswain, you give it to her!' So, ma'am, I got some pictures took showin' all of us."

Ericksen took an envelope from his pocket and passed it to the girl. She drew forth some photographs — and her face went white.

"Look here, Ericksen!" Dennis leaned forward, his eyes gripping the gaze of the sailor. "There are some things we don't understand. Why did you come in person to find Miss Hathaway? Who's your skipper, and why is he taking care of Captain



Hathaway? Why are you spending so much money on the project?"

The arrogant, light-blue eyes flashed suddenly—a flash of suspicion, of anger.

"Sailormen don't count pennies," said the man curtly. "Besides, the skipper—Cap'n Pontifex—he used to know Cap'n Hathaway. Friends, they were."

"And he expects to get some information through Miss Hathaway?"

Ericksen's freckled features reddened. His one satanic eyebrow twitched upward.

"Aye, that's true enough; but what it is, ain't for me to say. 'You mind your jaw-tackle, boatswain,' says the skipper. That's all."

"Mr. Dennis will go West with us," said Florence Hathaway softly, extending the pictures to Dennis. "You will furnish expenses, Mr. Ericksen?"

"Aye, miss." In the light-blue eyes Dennis read a sudden avid gleam. They were very dangerous, those eyes, very predatory and

unscrupulous. "Aye, miss—here an' now."

The seaman drew from his pocket a small roll of bills and counted off three fifties which he extended to Dennis. The latter took them. The eyes of the two men met and held; and again Dennis felt that sense of enmity, of forced geniality, as though the man were concealing a deadly hostility beneath a show of eager conciliation. First Boatswain Joe had desired to propitiate him; now he desired to propitiate Florence Hathaway.

Dennis shoved the money into his pocket, despite a glance of entreaty from the girl.

The photographs numbered four; in each was shown a figure in a wheel-chair—and the figure was that of Captain Hathaway. Dennis had seen other and older pictures of Florence Hathaway's father, and he recognized at once that massive countenance, that giant frame, those wide and unafraid eyes. He looked less at this figure, however, than

at those others showing in the pictures.

One was Captain Pontifex—a man tall and thin, face cavernous and pallid, with deep-sunk eyes and a curled black moustache. Another was that of Mrs. Pontifex—"the Missus", as Boatswain Joe termed her; her face was indistinct, although her figure seemed very large. In two of the pictures Ericksen himself showed. The only other figure was that of a black man, quite indistinct, whom Ericksen described as the skipper's mate, Manuel Mendez, a "black Portuguese" from the Cape Verde Islands, Tom Dennis returned the envelope to Ericksen.

"I don't want your thousand dollars," he said quietly. "I've told Miss Hathaway all you said to me, and your offer of a bribe; it is not necessary."

Ericksen was quite unperturbed.

"Then, miss, I take it that you'll go?"

Florence smiled at him; and when she smiled, her frail features were suddenly

lighted as by warm sunshine.

"Meet us here for luncheon to-morrow, Mr. Ericksen, and I'll give you my decision."

"Yes, ma'am—and if I may say so, there's a bit o' haste."

"Certainly. If we go, we'll be ready to catch the limited at eight to-morrow night."

"Couldn't ask no better, miss!" exclaimed the sailor. "Shipshape talk; that's what it is. 'If we go,' says you, 'we'll go on the jump'—just like that! Aye, all Bristol-fashion and trim! I'm proud to ha' met you, Miss Hathaway, and I hope you'll be able to get a few words out o' your poor father."

Ericksen checked himself abruptly, as though he had said too much. But he did not ask any questions concerning the money he had given Dennis; and this, to the mind of Dennis was an unnatural and puzzling fact, for Ericksen would hardly have handed over the money unless he were certain of Florence Hathaway's decision. The entire

attitude of this seaman was puzzling in the extreme. His money carelessness might be explained by the fact that Captain Pontifex was backing him—but it looked queer.

Something of these thoughts was troubling Tom Dennis as he left the building with Florence Hathaway; they had parted with Ericksen in the restaurant lobby, seemingly to the entire satisfaction of the seaman. Dennis had already phoned for a taxicab, and as they went bowling up toward the North Shore, the girl noticed his silence.

"Well, Tom? A penny for your thoughts!"

"I was wondering what Ericksen's game can be—and who that Cap'n Pontifex is!"

"I never heard of him. Certainly father never mentioned him. Well, you're going to keep that money?"

"Yes. It's fair loot from the enemy."

"Enemy? But, Tom—surely you don't think Ericksen and his friends——"

"I'm convinced that there's something



back of it all, Florence, something we don't know about! And that it's nothing very good."

The girl laughed. "Oh, Tom, you're delicious! Well, suit yourself; we'll go West to-morrow night—that is, I'm going. You can only go on one condition."

"Yes?" He looked at her, suspicious of the twinkle in her eyes. "What is it?"

"Tell you in a minute, dear. Now, it's true that you've failed in Marshville?"

"Absolutely and utterly."

"And you don't know what you're going to do?"

"No."

"It would be very foolish for us to marry, wouldn't it—especially with poor father to be taken care of? I have eight hundred dollars in the bank—a little surprise for you dear; but we shall probably have to stay West and get a fresh start. And, Tom, it'll take a long time before we get on our feet, won't it?"

He stared gloomily at the taxicab window, bitterly conscious that she spoke the truth.

"Of course," he assented. "I had no intention of coming to you, a failure, and holding you to your promise, Florence." His voice was harsh. "I doubt if I would have come, only that this other affair brought me. You're quite right. It would be criminal for us to marry, with only a few dollars in the world, and your helpless father——"

"Hush!" Her hand fluttered over his lips, and he promptly kissed it. "Don't say that it would be criminal, Tom; it would only be foolish."

"What's the condition?" he insisted.

"I'm coming to that. You admit, then, that in our present circumstances we should play the safe game, wait until we get established in the West, and until we get on our feet financially?"

"We ought to, of course," he nodded, storm in his eyes. "It would be folly to face poverty, to assume everything——"

"Isn't it very foolish to be in love at all, Tom, dear?"

"Not with you! That's something nobody could help."

"Then this is my condition; and if you refuse, you can't go West! To-morrow morning we shall be married. We shall deliberately be foolish—assume our burdens, have each other and make the best of things! Oh, don't stare at me. Don't you think my love and confidence and faith in you are supreme, dear? They are. We'll only win by daring—so we shall dare everything! And with each other, Tom—we shall win!"

## CHAPTER III

### LAYING A COURSE

When the dinner was over, Boatswain Joe was in no haste to leave the restaurant; but he returned to the table and ordered a drink, having seen Dennis and Florence Hathaway depart. As he had already paid for the meal, giving the waiter a handsome *pourboire*, no objection was made to his remaining as long as he wished. He stated that he expected a telephone-call.

Nearly an hour later, indeed, the waiter summoned him to the lobby. Ericksen took up the telephone-receiver and said: "Aye, matey!" Then he listened. Again he said: "Aye, matey!" and hung up the receiver.

He took the elevator to the street and briskly walked the two and a half blocks to a down-town hotel. It appeared that he was stopping here, for he went directly

to the desk, demanded his key, then vanished in the elevator.

Fifteen minutes later a man inquired at the desk for Mr. Ericksen, and was shown to the room occupied by Boatswain Joe. This second man was as peculiar in appearance as the red-haired boatswain. He was rather small, very dapper in looks, and wore a tight little moustache on his upper lip. His movements were swift, agile, extremely alert. One would have said that he was a Frenchman, although upon entering Ericksen's room he spoke in good English.

"Ah, Boatswain! Well done, my friend; you described them excellently."

Ericksen regarded him with a twisted smile.

"Then you followed them?"

"Certainly. They went to a place on the North Side, a girls' school where she teaches; presently he came out and walked to a lodging-house on North Clark Street. I followed him inside and engaged a room



adjoining his, which I shall occupy this afternoon. He is on the third *étage*—what you call—yes, flight! Upstairs."

"Good, Dumont." Ericksen ran his fingers through his tousled red hair. "We've made quick work of it, eh? Got here two days ago, and ready to slip our cable to-morrow night. 'Move sharp,' says the Skipper; 'crack on all sail!' And we've done it. Hey? You've got your stuff all complete?"

Dumont lighted a cigarette and blew a thin cloud, nodding.

"All done. Everything is to be ready for me to-morrow morning. I shall inspect it; then it will be packed in a special suitcase, ready for the shipment."

"Good. We're leaving to-morrow night at eight bells or thereabouts. Get your ticket in the morning, and check the stuff on it. Sure it's what the Skipper ordered?"

Dumont inspected him with a sleepy cattish smile.

"Me, my friend, I make no mistakes. Ah,

that skipper of ours! He is a marvel, a great man! It is not every man who can improve upon the so-wonderful Dumas! But this our skipper, he does so—pouf! Like that. To him—it is nothing at all."

"I dunno about that there Dumaw," returned Ericksen. "I used to know a guy o' that name, a nigger mate on the *Columbia* packet out o' Singapore——"

Dumont chuckled. "Worry not your so red head, my friend! Now, suppose you have the goodness to explain? Who is this man with the big body and the dangerous eyes?"

"Dangerous, rats!" Ericksen snorted. "On his uppers, he is. Ran foul o' law-sharks an' got laid on his beam-ends. He's suspicious; that's all. He and the lady are goin' to get spliced, see? Or they think they are. His name's Dennis. He means to go West with us."

The sleepy eyes of Dumont suddenly

opened. They became very black and flashing. His white teeth showed beneath his tiny moustache in a smile.

"Oh, I see! It is in that direction the land lies! Well, let him come. Let our so-wonderful skipper take care of him!"

Ericksen shook his head. "Nope. Skipper says: 'Boatswain, don't you bring no barnacles along! Bring that young lady—and no barnacles.' Skipper knowed what he was about; strike me blind if he didn't! So Mr. Dennis he stays here."

Dumont regarded his companion with an admiring air.

"Ah, you have the head, my friend! You have not the looks, perhaps, but the head——"

"What's the matter with my looks, Frenchy?" demanded Ericksen suddenly, regarding the smaller man with steady eyes; "Come, now! Step aft an' speak it out, you! What's the matter with 'em?"

"Nothing in particular—merely the general

aspect." And Dumont cocked his head on one side in pretended survey. Then he broke into laughter. "*Drôle!* You cannot afford to fight with me, eh? No. And you know better. Eh? I have always desired, my friend, to get my finger in that left eye of yours; it looks so devilish! I always wondered how the socket would look—if there were not a little devil sitting there, *couchant!*"

Ericksen changed countenance suddenly, and sat back in his seat. Behind those jesting words of Dumont's there lay a grotesque speculation—an earnestness, even! The dapper little man assumed a frightful air, an air of abnormality. One sensed that he spoke of tearing out a man's eye with calm enjoyment, as though—as though he had done it before this.

"You're right, hearty," said Ericksen, wetting his lips. "Right-o! No trouble in the after cabin, and there'll be none for'ard. What were we speakin' of? Oh, yes! Dennis.

Well, you go and occupy that room to-night, and do your business to-morrow morning, then go back there. Dennis will mess with me an' the lady to-morrow noon, see? You get me a scrap of his fist—or better, take a squint at it and copy this here entry in the log."

Ericksen took from the table a paper bearing a few lines of writing, on which he had been engaged when Dumont entered, and passed it to his friend. The latter scrutinised the writing, and chuckled softly.

"Oh! For the lady, eh? Ah, what a head you have! It is wasted upon you, my friend. It should have gone with such intelligence as mine."

"You lay off them personal remarks, Frenchy," snapped Ericksen suddenly.

"Aye, matey," retorted the other with mocking air. "Well? What next?"

"You telephone me here right after noon mess. I'll be able to give you Dennis' after-noon programme then. You've got to stop



him from taking that train to-morrow night—an' stop him hard! Don't forget to take all his money, either—strip him to the bone."

Dumont shrugged. "What would you? Here in Chicago are the police, and I like them not. It is not as if we were aboard the *Pelican*, my friend."

"Oh, don't kill him," snapped Ericksen impatiently. "Merely a good stiff jolt that will leave him on his back a few days. And do it at the last minute, too. 'Take no chances, Boatswain,' says the Skipper, 'and if there's any wind in sight, get your top-canvas down.' So do it at the last minute, and then get the train. Have a taxi waitin'."

"All right." Dumont straightened up. "Let's go see a picture-show, eh?"

Ericksen assented with a grunt.

Promptly at one o'clock on Monday, Boatswain Joe was waiting in the lobby of the Royton restaurant, when Tom Dennis and Florence were deposited by the elevator.

With a cheerful grin on his freckled features, Ericksen approached them.

"Good day to you. 'Two bells,' says you, and two bells it is, all shipshape! It's fine and rosy ye look, ma'am!"

"Thank you, Mr. Ericksen." And under his light-blue predatory eyes the girl blushed as she shook hands. "I've been shopping this morning, and that always makes a woman happy, you know!"

They entered the breakfast-room, where the waiter, mindful of Ericksen's tip, led them to a table by one of the front windows overlooking the Art Institute and the sparkling blue lake front.

"Does it remind you of the sea?" Tom Dennis motioned toward the blue horizon, and smiled at the sailor.

"In a way, yes. It looks like the sea down south, under the Line."

"You've been in the South Seas?" asked the girl quickly. Ericksen met her gaze, and seemed a trifle embarrassed.

"Yes'm, oncet or twicet. I been whalin' with Cap'n Pontifex, you know, all us whalers work off Lower California and across to the islands 'fore going north—that is, we used to. Nowadays things change. 'There's no tellin' at all,' says the Skipper, 'what kind of a wind is rising these days.' And Skipper's right."

"You seem to like your skipper." Florence laughed. "Is he a nice man?"

Ericksen's down-drawn left lip twitched as if in repression of a grimace.

"Nice is as nice does, hey? I reckon he's all right, Miss Hathaway."

"Oh, you mustn't call me that any more," said the girl calmly, and held out her hand. "Look at the present I got an hour ago!"

Ericksen's predatory eyes fastened upon the gold circlet. His face whitened. Tom Dennis, watching intently, saw the man's lips open and form a silent unspoken curse. In the light-blue eyes he read a message of

astounded incredulity, of passionate anger.

"You—you've been an' got spliced!" Ericksen, speaking hoarsely, looked at Florence. His face changed suddenly. He plunged to his feet and extended a horny hand across the table toward Dennis.

"Strike me blind!" he ejaculated. "Took me all of a heap, it did! Well, sir, this is a surprise! And only an hour ago, you say? Congratulations, and may you always have a fair course and a bone in your teeth; aye, and a good cargo under hatches! Well, well—strike me blind if I'd thought this was goin' to happen! We'll have a bottle o' fizz-wine, hey? A toast all around—real weddin' dinner! And to think o' me sittin' here with no present, nothin' but an honest sailor-man's hearty good wishes to give—why, it fair breaks me up!"

"Oh, we decided to make the trip West our honeymoon," said Tom Dennis, with a smile at Florence. "It was too good a chance to miss, Boatswain."

"Then—then you're going, hey? To-night?"

"Yes, Mr. Ericksen." Florence nodded. "And believe me, I'd sooner have your good wishes than all the presents in the world! Good wishes mean lots more, don't they?"

"Sometimes, miss. Ha—I mean, Mrs. Dennis—sometimes," assented Ericksen solemnly. "And to think o' you springing it on me that way—why, it took me all aback, it did!"

So the "fizz-wine" came and was drunk with many toasts.

In the course of the luncheon it developed that Florence was to spend the afternoon packing for the trip, and would dine at the school in order to save time. Tom Dennis, who had in view an endeavour to secure orders for some special articles on the West from his former newspaper editors, arranged to call for her in time to make the train that night.



Ericksen insisted upon protracting the luncheon with a second bottle of "fizz-wine" in honour of the occasion; afterward all three departed, and separated at the Adams Street entrance to the "L", where the newly-married couple said farewell to Boatswain Joe.

No sooner had they vanished up the stairway than Boatswain Joe made all haste to his hotel. He found no message at the desk; but when he entered his room he found Dumont awaiting him.

"You—here! What's up, Frenchy?"

Smilingly, Dumont extended him a note. Ericksen seized it and examined it with quick approval.

"It was very easily done, my friend," said Dumont, yawning sleepily. "So I came here myself. You seem to be irritated, eh? What is the matter?"

Ericksen gave vent to a full-blown curse.

"Matter enough! Here that swab has been and married her this mornin'!"

Dumont's brows lifted. He uttered a long whistle.

"They are married! Well, Cap'n Pontifex, he will not like that, eh?"

"Blast it!" snarled Ericksen. "Don't you see what it means?"

"More or less," Dumont spat out the words with venom. "It means that the Skipper promised me the girl, eh? And that now he will try——"

"You bloody fool!" roared Ericksen, smashing his big fist down on the table. "Don't it mean squalls ahead of us all? Don't it mean that instead of havin' her to deal with, now we have him too? Don't it mean that he's signed up for a share in old Hathaway's leavin's? And if we don't scuttle him, then he'll scuttle us!"

Dumont caressed his moustache, his dark eyes narrowed and alert.

"*Mille tonnerre!*" he ejaculated slowly. "You are right. He is the old man's son-in-law, eh? Ah, but you have the head, my

friend! You see the things, yes! And her signature would be no good, eh?"

Ericksen rammed tobacco into his pipe and held his peace for a moment, until the briar was smoking.

"Now," he said shortly, "that train leaves to-night at one bell?"

"Eight and the half," assented Dumont with a nod.

"He's goin' to call for her about eight bells, see? He'll prob'ly be in his room stowin' his dunnage bag about six bells. You have to scuttle him, Frenchy—all proper. Open the sea-cocks and stand by the ship till she's gone. No mistake!"

"And the madame?" queried Dumont. "Who will call for her?"

"I will. And this here note you've written——"

"Oh, now I understand!" Dumont chuckled softly. "You have the head, my friend! Good. I must scuttle this fellow,

eh? Well, it is for all our sakes now. And by the way, I have taken a compartment, so that I could keep my eye on the suitcase better. The Skipper said to be careful. I had to buy another ticket."

Ericksen merely waved his hand carelessly. "You scuttle that swab, Frenchy, and money won't cut no figure. So you'll carry the suitcase, eh? Better send it down to the train ahead of you. 'Don't get your lines tangled,' says the Skipper. You mind that! I'll sleep with you in the compartment, eh? All right."

"All right," assented the other. "I'll send the suitcase down to the train. Now see, my friend! Is it not humorous—what you call the paradox? In order to make our little venture legal, we must first keel a man! Is it not droll!"

Boatswain Joe thrust forward his head, and so terribly threatening were his arrogant light-blue eyes that Dumont flinched a trifle.

"Never you mind your laughin'—it ain't time yet, Frenchy! You mind your course, d'ye see? Fall off a couple o' points and things'll be in a mess, see? You mind your course! You and me have big lays in this thing. If it goes through all shipshape, we'll have money. Now, you let her head fall off and there'll be trouble, see?"

Dumont spread out his hands, Gallic fashion.

"My friend," he said softly, "there is no need for threats. Me, I know what to do. Me, I shall do it, so! But remember one thing, you: on the train, you shall introduce me to the lady, so I shall console her for the absent one. Eh?"

"Agreed!" Ericksen made an impatient gesture. "You're a dago and you can't help settin' your course by a woman, I s'pose. But you better watch out, Frenchy. This here one is married."

Dumont smiled. "I shall attend to that—to-night."



## CHAPTER IV

### THE SQUARE SUITCASE

Tom Dennis, in the meantime, was making some discoveries.

In the course of the afternoon he dropped in at his old newspaper office with the object of seeing the boys and trying to get some special assignments on the Pacific Coast. In this latter endeavour he was more successful than he had dared hope, for the editor declared at once in favour of a series of articles on the Canadian training-camps in the vicinity of Vancouver, and even spoke of syndicating them.

Thus, when Dennis returned to the city-room, he was in hopeful vein. Most of his old friends were still on the staff, with some new men; he said nothing about his marriage, or about his failure in Marshville, but

stated that he had been called to the Pacific Coast on unexpected business, and let it go at that.

Then Margate entered, and gripped his hand with a shout. Margate was the "big man", who covered political conventions and topics of country-wide interest. It appeared that Margate had himself just returned from the Coast where he had been doing some big things with the moving-picture stars. Dennis retired into a corner with him, and in the course of their chat casually inquired:

"I suppose you never heard of a sea-captain out there by the name of Pontifex, did you? It's an odd sort of moniker——"

Margate grinned.

"Heard of him? I should say yes! He's the only chap I ever heard of who put it all over the motion-picture people. Why, they're yelling about it yet!"

"How's that?" asked Dennis in unaffected surprise.

"It seems this chap Pontifex owned an old whaling brig. She was laid up at San Pedro, in pretty bad shape, and the Greatorex people wanted to use her in a couple of scenarios. So Pontifex leased her to them—savvy? About six months ago they got through with her—and then they discovered something. In his lease, Pontifex had slipped over a couple of jokers; they had to refit the old hooker from top to bottom and make her ready for sea. I forget how many thousands it cost them. I remember she was sent up to him at Vancouver, just before I came East, and everyone was slipping the laugh to the Greatorex folks at the way a whaling skipper had put it over them. And believe me, the job was done right! It takes a genius to manage a stunt like that nowadays."

"Then you don't know Pontifex personally?"

"Lord, no! What are you running down, anyhow? Is he a pirate?"

Dennis laughed. "I hope not. I've heard some things about him, though—good human-interest stuff for a magazine feature, if they're true. I'll look him up at Vancouver. What's the name of his ship?"

"The *Pelican*. Say, if you're there any time, look up my brother; he's doing shipping stuff on *The Vancouver Mail*. He'll be glad to do the honours, and you might pick up some good dope from him."

When he left the office, Dennis sought the railroad office and bought tickets for himself and Florence to Vancouver, obtaining a compartment; the money which Ericksen had given him, with what he had left of his own, proved quite sufficient. Then, encountering Margate and a couple more men from the office, he went to dinner with them. At seven o'clock he was on the way home to pack.

It had not been a highly romantic wedding-day, he reflected, either for himself or for

Florence; but they would have a trip of four days in which to make up for that. The commissions for work at Vancouver were a tremendous aid to Dennis, keeping him from feeling that he was loafing on the job. The money, too, would help. And he anticipated no particular difficulty in getting work. He was one of the well-known men in his profession, and a place would be made for him; he was not a newspaper "tramp". He was not one of the shiftless or incompetent men-of-all-trades who seek the Coast as a haven of refuge. Already, in view of his unexpected marriage and the all-impelling faith of Florence, he had risen above the despondency induced by his Marshville venture.

He had obtained no information from Florence which could serve to throw any light upon Ericksen or Captain Pontifex; she had been entirely ignorant of what knowledge they wished to extract from her or from her paralysed father. Captain Hathaway's last ship, a freighter named the



*John Simpson*, had been lost while *en route* from San Francisco to Vladivostok. She had gone down with all hands somewhere off the Aleuts, and with Captain Hathaway totally paralysed since his rescue it was unlikely that her story would ever be known.

As Tom Dennis packed together his few belongings, with purchases which he had made that day, he blessed the girl who had that morning married him, and he swore savagely to himself that it would not be for worse, but for better. Not easily had he assented to her proposal; not easily had he grasped her reasons for making it; but now he realized the sheer truth which she had seen from the first. There was no danger whatever that he would be unable to provide the necessities of life. True, heart-trouble, of which he had never before been aware, had barred him from wearing a uniform; but this disease was a remote danger. His ability lay in his head, and he had no doubt about his ability to win a fair living wage.

The paralytic Captain Hathaway would be in some ways a burden, but one which Tom Dennis cheerfully assumed.

"With faith in the future and in each other, we would have been fools not to marry!" he confided to his suitcase. "We'll pull through; and we'll make a tenfold better fight for having each other! I'm almost glad that the old *Clarion* went under——"

He did not hear his door open; nor did he hear the approach of a swift catlike form from the doorway. He did, however, feel the draught from the open door. He half-turned; but he turned only to feel a crashing blow on the head.

Dumont stood over the prostrate figure, softly chuckling, and stowed away the black-back which had dealt the blow. The figure of Dennis lay motionless, arms outflung; his profile was visible against the rug, and the eyes were closed. His assailant eyed

him for a moment, then stepped to the window and drew down the blind. A single electric bulb lighted the room.

Dumont returned to his victim. From his pocket he produced a handkerchief folded and padded with cotton. From another pocket he took a thin flat vial of chloroform which he poured heavily over the handkerchief; the fumes sickened the air. Then he knelt, and put a hand half under Dennis, feeling the heart.

"Good!" he muttered with an air of pride. He spoke in French, his voice low. "It was a good job. The bump on his head will not be observed. They will think it suicide."

And then sudden wild surprise and consternation convulsed his features. His left hand, beneath Dennis, was suddenly seized and twisted by iron fingers. Dumont, a startled oath on his lips, was pulled forward off his balance and fell headlong over his victim. Both bodies heaved madly.

Across the would-be assassin the big figure

of Tom Dennis sprawled heavily. Dumont had been entirely taken by surprise. Dennis seized the handkerchief and clapped it over the face of his opponent.

The Frenchman fought. He struggled viciously, silently, desperately; he struck with fists and nails and knees, biting at the hand which held the bandage across his mouth and nose.

"No use, my friend," said Dennis, speaking half-forgotten French. "You didn't hit quite hard enough."

The convulsive struggles of Dumont, held helpless by sheer weight, quieted into jerky movements. Tom Dennis knocked away the saturated handkerchief and turned the limp figure on its face. He shook out the handkerchief and knotted the wet linen about the wrists of Dumont. Then, weakly, he caught at a chair and pulled himself erect.

Dennis felt deathly sick. That clip over the ear had been a shrewd one, and in the closed room the fumes of the narcotic reeked

from the bottle which had spilled its entire contents on the floor. Dizzy and staggering, he groped his way to the window and flung it open. He knelt there, his head on the window-sill, bathing himself in the fresh air.

"A near thing!" he muttered. "A near thing!"

How long he lay there he did not know. The sickness, the nausea, passed from him by slow degrees. He gingerly felt his head, finding that the skin was unbroken; a lump had already risen. His senses were still aswim when at length he rose to his feet.

The Frenchman was senseless, but was probably in no danger. Inspecting the man, Dennis remembered to have seen him entering the adjoining room that same evening. But what could have been the motive of this amazing assault by an utter stranger, a fellow lodger with whom he had never exchanged a word? It did not appear to be robbery, for Dumont was well-dressed. The



rugged features of Tom Dennis grew hard and harsh as he gazed down, remembering the man's words. The chloroform had not been intended merely to knock him out; it had been intended to kill him! Why?

Stooping, he ran swiftly through the contents of Dumont's pockets. He found an automatic, the bluejack which had struck him and a thin keen knife. He found a wad of yellow-backed bills, which he stuck into his own pocket with a chuckle. He found no letters, nothing else at all—except an envelope such as is issued at railroad ticket offices. In this envelope were two tickets—one the return half of a Vancouver-to-Chicago ticket, the other a one-way ticket from Chicago to Vancouver; and with them was the Pullman ticket calling for a compartment. The date was of this very day, the train that upon which Dennis himself was leaving! In the envelope, also, were two small brass keys.

Dropping into a chair, Tom Dennis frowned

over these clues. Could the man have some connection with Ericksen—coming as he had from Vancouver, and being about to return there? Perhaps. Dennis suspected Ericksen, had suspected him from the first. But there was no obvious connection; there was no link of direct accusation. Had Ericksen been behind this assault?

Manifestly this assassin had two tickets so that he could occupy a compartment alone. Why? For what purpose? At this thought Dennis went to his door, passed into the hall and went directly to the next door—that of Dumont's room. He found the room quite empty. Upon the bed was a small valise, but it contained nothing except linen and articles of travel.

"Blamed if I can account for it!" muttered Dennis, returning to his own room. "This fellow meant to bury me; that's certain. I'll keep his money as fair loot. About his two tickets and—hm! I'd better keep them too, and occupy that compartment occasionally.

There may be something in it which will give me a clue. I'll do it."

He glanced at his watch, suddenly conscious that time had been passing. He was aghast to find that it was eight o'clock—and the train left at eight-thirty!

With a hasty ejaculation he caught up his suitcase, crammed it shut and after a last glance at the recumbent assassin turned out the light and ran downstairs to the hall telephone. He was too late to call for Florence now; she must catch a taxi to the station!

His first thought was to order a taxicab for himself; then he called up the school where Florence had been teaching. There ensued five minutes—a frantic five minutes—of delay before a cool woman's voice informed him that Miss Hathaway had departed some time before; a gentleman had called for her.

Dennis demanded a description of the man, and recognized Ericksen.

When the taxi appeared, Dennis flung himself into the cab and thrust a bill at the driver with orders to make the station regardless of traffic officers. He saw quite clearly, now, that Ericksen had planned this attempted murder; there was no proof of it, but he needed none. What was the reason behind it? This question maddened Dennis. Was Florence being abducted? Such a thing seemed impossible and incredible, outside a movie scenario.

When Dennis reached the station he had about three minutes left. He took the gate at a rush, showing his tickets hurriedly, and swung aboard the nearest open vestibule of the train just as the porters were picking up their stools.

He found that the compartment-car was up ahead. Since he had his own tickets, with that of Florence, she would certainly not be in their compartment, but probably in one of the Pullmans. So he started through

the train, scrutinising each seat as he came to it.

Two cars ahead, he came suddenly upon Florence, who was alone. She sprang up with a glad cry, and Dennis saw that she had been weeping.

"Oh—I knew you'd make it, after all, Tom!" she broke out, her hands going to his.

Dennis stooped and touched her lips with his.

"All right now, old girl," he said, not bothering for an explanation of her words. "Where's Ericksen?"

"He just went forward to arrange about our tickets, he said."

Dennis beckoned to the porter who was approaching. He gave the darky the number of his own compartment and ordered Florence's grips taken there; then he turned to his wife.

"Now, Mrs. Dennis," he said, chuckling as she flushed at the name, "you go to that



compartment and wait until I show up, will you please? I have a little business with Mr. Ericksen—and it won't wait a minute!"

"Is anything wrong? Your note—it said that you might make the train——"

Dennis took from her hand a folded note and glanced at it. Then he thrust it into his pocket and patted her shoulder.

"I'll be along presently, dear. No, nothing wrong! I have some good news for you, too—got some assignments out West. I'll meet you in a few minutes."

Leaving his grip and a coin with the porter, Tom Dennis rushed forward. When he gained the compartment-car, he consulted Dumont's tickets and found that the latter had engaged Compartment Six. Dennis went directly to this compartment and knocked. The voice of Ericksen bade him enter. He threw open the door and stepped inside the little room.

"Well!" Dennis closed the door behind him and stood, smiling. "Expecting your

friend, are you? He's not coming, Boat-swain Joe."

There was no doubt about it; Ericksen was hard hit. He stared at Dennis, his mouth agape, his light-blue eyes wide-set.

"Strike me blind," he affirmed, huskily, "if it ain't you!"

"You win. What are you doing in this compartment?"

"Who—me? Why, matey, I was lookin' for the skipper of this here train, and I pops in here for a bit of a smoke, out of the way and quiet! And where might you have come from, matey? I thought you weren't coming along, this cruise."

"What made you think that?" demanded Dennis.

"Why, strike me blind!" stated Ericksen with energy. "Didn't that there swab give me your note sayin' you wouldn't show up?"

Tom Dennis was staggered by this defence.

"What note are you talking about? The one you gave Mrs. Dennis?"

"Aye, that and t'other one! Give 'em to me, he did, and said you wouldn't show up. The note said the same thing, and asked me to call for Mrs. Dennis, see? Well, I done it—and this here is the thanks I get!"

"What kind of a man gave you the notes?"

Ericksen was sweating profusely. At this question he screwed up his eyes and bit on his pipe-stem in thought.

"Well," he answered at length, "a sort o' rakish craft, he was, with little what-d'ye-call-'ems of moustaches, and looked like a dago."

That answered to the description of the assassin, and Dennis hesitated under the impact of a sudden thought.

What if that Frenchman had not been an accomplice of Ericksen at all—but an enemy, with some ulterior purpose at work behind his actions? There was as much in favour of this theory as of the other.

"See here, Ericksen!" Dennis met the

light-blue gaze with a frowning level scrutiny. "If your story's true, that same man who gave you the fake message—for it was a fake—tried to murder me about an hour ago. He had a ticket to this compartment, and a return-trip ticket from here to Vancouver in his pocket. Do you know him?"

"Know him? Not me!" asserted Boat-swain Joe virtuously. "Did you give him to the police?"

Dennis laughed grimly. "Worse than that. Well, do you know of anyone who might have followed you from Vancouver here? Have you any enemies?"

From Ericksen broke a sudden exclamation. "Strike me blind! If you ain't hit it right on the head, you have! Somebody has smoked out the Skipper's game; that's what!"

"And what's the game?" snapped Dennis. At this the sailor wagged his head.

"Can't tell that. 'Mind your jaw-tackle, Boatswain,' says the Skipper. It's got to do with Miss Hathaway—I mean Mrs. Dennis—and her father. It ain't for me to say. But there's money in it, and somebody's smoked it out—strike me blind if they ain't!"

"Then why should that fellow have tackled me, instead of you?"

Again Ericksen wagged his head. "Can't tell you that! Didn't you make the blighter talk?"

"He was in no condition to talk when I got through with him," returned Dennis, and the sailor sighed—perhaps with relief.

Glancing about, Dennis saw only one article of luggage in the compartment—a small square suitcase, obviously new, and very well made. It lacked any mark of identification. Beyond doubt it belonged to the assassin.

"That was here when you dropped in for



a smoke?" demanded Dennis, pointing at it.

Ericksen surveyed the square suitcase with surprise. "Must ha' been!"

From his pocket Tom Dennis produced the two small keys which the assassin had carried. He fitted one of them to the lock of the square suitcase; it worked. Meantime, Ericksen was watching him with ill-concealed anxiety.

Throwing back the lid of the square suitcase Dennis saw that it contained nothing except a small phonograph and half a dozen very large records. The labels on the records proclaimed them to be grand-opera selections. Frowning thoughtfully, Dennis closed and locked the suitcase.

"I'll take this along. You might as well keep this compartment, Ericksen—I took that scoundrel's tickets; here they are. You'll find this place more comfortable than a berth. And you needn't mention to Mrs. Dennis what's happened. It might only

worry her. I fancy we've given your friends the slip entirely, eh? Sorry I suspected you at first."

"Oh, don't mention it," said Ericksen, wriggling a little.

## CHAPTER V

### THE "PELICAN"

The brigantine-rigged *Pelican* was of but a hundred and fifty tons burden; yet her royal yard stood athwart the sky nearly ninety feet above the deck. She was not a pretty ship, despite her snowy cleanliness, but she was tall enough; in her 'midships stood the brick try-works, with two funnels, where blubber was rendered into oil; and she reeked of the whale-juice that had soaked her stout oaken timbers these forty years.

As she lay at anchor in Vancouver harbour, well up toward the second narrows, there were several peculiar features about her—peculiar, that is, to the trained seaman's eye.

She was bound for sea; yet she was altogether too late to get the spring catch off the Siberian coast; and if she went up into

the Arctic to fill her hogsheads, she would certainly be ice-bound that winter, and few whalers were taking chances on being ice-bound those days! Then her crew had been all aboard for two days, and the majority of them were Kanakas—both facts being unusual. Why the *Pelican* was still hanging about the harbour no one could say.

This old whaler had none too good a reputation, even among her kind; but this was chiefly because of her officers. Manuel Mendez, the black Cape Verde mate, was a strapping big man with a thin eagle-like profile exactly like that of the mummy of Rameses—a great hooked nose, and air of gentle refinement, and delicate lips. Manuel Mendez played the flute beautifully and was said to be a killer of men.

The second officer was an old man, forty years a whaler. Mr. Leman wore a fringe of white hair and whisker, stood six feet two and was muscled like a bull moose; they said he had been known to take a man's arm

in his two hands and break it like a rotten stick. His face was heavy and flat, the eyes small and bright and deeply set. His nose had been crushed and had a crooked twist.

One of the boat-steerers, Ericksen, was gone from the ship. The other, like the mate, was a Cape Verde man; his name was a Portuguese one, but he was called Corny. The brigantine had no cooper, for a wonder; her cook, like Ericksen, was absent.

The steward was a vicious little Cockney pickpocket who wanted to get out of Canada before the draught caught him; the cabin-boy was a green farmer-lad named Jerry, a moon-faced boy who had run off the farm a month previously. There was no one else aft.

In the forecastle were fifteen men. Ten of these were Kanakas—merry brown men who spoke their own guttural tongue and some broken English, and like all of their kind were noble seamen. The other five were broken-down white men, scum of the city,



who were kept drunk and under hatches until the *Pelican* should get to sea.

The ship was pervaded by a restless air—that is, in the after cabins. Up forward the Kanakas sang and worked light-heartedly, and the five bums snored in drunken repose. But aft all was different. Restrained excitement, an air of suspense, much whispering and wild speculating; thus the atmosphere seemed electrically charged.

Everyone knew that there was an invalid down below—a man in a wheeled chair, a man who could not speak a single word or move a finger. Jerry affirmed he could eat, and could use his ears, but little more, as his eyes also were somewhat affected. Then, the skipper's wife was aboard for the cruise; and when she came to the deck, men smartened up—not because they loved her, but because they feared and hated her. She was known to all aboard as the Missus—that was her title.

It was five in the afternoon. Two bells had

just been struck on the brass ship's bell abaft the mizzenmast when the Missus appeared on the quarter-deck. Sea-watches had been set, and Mr. Leman had the deck. Mrs. Pontifex was a strapping big woman with iron-grey hair and a jaw like rock; her unchanging expression was indomitable and not too sweet.

"No sign of that boat, Mr. Leman?" she demanded in a raucous voice which held a distinct Yankee twang.

"No, ma'am," meekly responded the second officer. "Train must ha' been late. Them trains often is, I'm told."

The Missus espied a Kanaka sprawled in the waist; half-leaning against the try-works, he was asleep in the westerning sun. She strode to him and aroused him with a sturdy kick in the ribs.

"Do your sleepin' daown below, ye scouse!" she roared. "This is no berth-deck. Yeou, Corny! Who went in Mr. Mendez' boat when he took the Cap'n ashore?"

"Six of the Kanakas, ma'am," responded the black boat-steerer.

"Hm! Then they'll not run off. All ready for sea, Mr. Leman?"

"All ready, ma'am."

"The minute yeou sight that boat, break aout the signal for the tug. When the boat comes alongside, yeou tell the cap'n that we've been ordered to shift anchorage. That'll keep the girl and her fool husband quiet, I reckon!"

"Yes, ma'am. And then?"

"Cast off the tug aoutside the Lion's Gate an' lay a course for Unalaska."

"But, ma'am—how about Frenchy? We ain't got no cook 'cept him!" Mr. Leman rubbed his fringe of whiskers in evident perturbation over putting to sea without a cook. "You know, ma'am, Boatswain Joe wired about him gettin' left behind "

"Never mind 'baout Dumont." Mrs. Pontifex's lips set in a grim line. "He's got his orders, and I wired money to him. He'll

go to Unalaska by steamer and wait there until we put in."

"And who'll do the cookin' meantime?"

"I will. Naow yeou get hove up on that hawser, so's yeou can jerk up the hook in a hurry."

Mr. Leman hastened forward, bawling orders as he went.

Now, if there was one thing in particular for which Tom Dennis was not in the least prepared, it was for the reception which awaited him at Vancouver. He had anticipated a seaman's cottage in the suburbs, a protracted stay at an hotel or boarding-house, and so forth.

Instead of this, upon alighting from the train he found himself and Florence shaking hands with Captain Pontifex to whom Ericksen introduced them with much delight. The "Skipper" was not, to the suspicious eye of Dennis, prepossessing in appearance. His curled black moustache, his

swarthy cavernous features, his alert dark eyes, were all well enough; but the moustache concealed a cruel and bitter mouth; the features were high-boned and sharp; and the eyes were of the heavy-lidded type—the eyes of a master of men, the eyes of a Hindenburg.

First impressions were almost effaced, however, by the polished cordiality of Pontifex. He was a man of education, of intense personality, and he was at some pains to make himself agreeable. Florence's first question was for her father.

"We have taken him aboard the *Pelican*, Mrs. Dennis; he seemed to miss the salt air, and the lease on our cottage was up," responded Pontifex. "This way, please—I have a taxicab waiting! I have a cabin all ready for you aboard ship, and Mrs. Pontifex promised to have a bang-up dinner at six sharp; so we've just time to make the ship. If you'll let me have your trunk-checks, Mr. Dennis——"



"But Captain, we can't impose upon your hospitality!" interrupted Tom Dennis. "It's mighty good of you, but——"

"Nonsense, my dear chap!" Pontifex laughed and seized his arm, impelling him toward the cab. "It's a great pleasure, I assure you! Of course you young married folks will be glad of solitude after you get settled down with the old cap'n, but—I suppose Ericksen told you the business we had in hand?"

"Ericksen told us nothing," returned Dennis.

"Good for the Boatswain!" Pontifex laughed again. "I warned him to keep a close tongue. Well, suppose we pass up business for to-night, and in the morning we'll get together, eh? The directors of the company will be all aboard then; you'll be our guests for a time."

"What company?" interjected Florence.

"Ah, that's the secret!" Pontifex bowed her into the cab, his white teeth showing in

a smile. "A surprise for you, madam! It was odd, the way I happened to pick up your father—poor man, stuck away in a sailor's home, unable to tell so much as his name! You know, we were always pretty good friends, Miles and I."

Tom Dennis found his suspicions fading, and his first dislike of Pontifex was lulled to rest by the man's vivid personality. Pontifex had character, plenty of it, and like all strong men could make himself greatly liked or greatly hated almost at will. He appeared to be a good-humoured, masterly sort of man, heartily loving a joke, and radiating an air of alert and genial manliness. Dennis adjudged him a good friend but a bad enemy.

"We hope that the shock of seeing you, Mrs. Dennis, will restore your father's power of speech," went on Pontifex. "For that reason we've not told him——"

"But how can he be so paralysed?"

demanded Florence quickly. "Can he hear, and not speak? Why——"

"My dear young lady, the best doctors in Vancouver can't account for it!" Pontifex shook his head with an air of paternal solicitude. "It's one of the freak cases of paralysis; but it's not at all an unusual case. He can move his eyelids slightly, his eyes perfectly; he can eat and drink fairly well; yet his vocal chords are entirely paralysed."

Without opportunity for further converse they reached the water-front, and Captain Pontifex led the way toward the landing-stage. Tom Dennis had his own grip, a huge affair as large as a small trunk, and two bags belonging to Florence; of these latter the skipper had assumed charge.

Upon reaching the boat with its six merry Kanaka rowers, Manuel Mendez was introduced by Pontifex. Mendez made up for his broken English by a wide grin, and assisted Florence down into the stern-sheets of the boat, beside the Skipper, who took charge of

the long steering-oar. Dennis climbed into the bow with Mendez.

After a short wait Ericksen appeared, a truckman helping him bear the one trunk which Florence had brought; this was stowed in the boat. Ericksen shook hands with Mendez, flinging a laughing greeting to the men; the Skipper, standing, flung an impatient word at Ericksen, and the latter turned to Dennis.

"I didn't see nothin' of that square suitcase, Mr. Dennis—the one you took out o' that other compartment."

Tom Dennis laughed unconcernedly. "Oh, that! There was nothing in it I wanted, Boatswain Joe; I gave it to the porter the first night out."

Ericksen dropped his pipe to the wharf and stooped for it, with a rumbling of low words which did not sound like blessings. Captain Pontifex changed countenance, then snapped a command at the boat steerer. His voice was suddenly metallic, piercing.

"Hurry up, there, Boatswain! We've no time to dally around."

Boatswain Joe, looking very much like a dog who is about to receive a sound thrashing, jumped down into the boat. The bowman shoved off. The oars flashed. The whale-boat swung out into the estuary.

Tom Dennis entertained an uneasy feeling that he had been bodily abducted—and laughed at himself for a simpleton. Mendez pointed out the *Pelican* as they approached her, and from the other direction a tug was crawling up to the brigantine. As the boat drew under the brown side of the ship, a flat white-whiskered face appeared above the ladder; Mendez informed Dennis that this was the second mate, Mr. Leman.

"Ahoy, Cap'n!" called Leman in unexpectedly stentorian tones. "We've been ordered to shift our anchorage, sir—port authorities. Tug comin' now!"



"Very well, Mr. Leman," returned Pontifex briskly. "Pass a line from the for'ard bitts and stand ready to heave up the hook. Mr. Mendez, will you attend to this luggage? All ready, Miss—pardon, Mrs. Dennis! May I assist you up the ladder?"

If Florence entertained any shrinking from that steep approach, she concealed it well, and with the aid of Pontifex was soon on the deck above being introduced to the Missus. Tom Dennis followed. The Missus gave him a mighty hand-grip, then turned to Florence.

"Supper's all ready," announced Mrs. Pontifex. "I suppose, poor dear, yeou'd sooner see your poor father first? Then come with me—do. Cap'n, yeou make that man Ericksen wash his face and hands before he sits daown to table! And put a clean shirt on him."

Boatswain Joe was just then coming up the side, and heard the words.

"You hear?" snapped Pontifex.

"Yes sir," he responded meekly, and his freckled face looked rather white.

Mrs. Pontifex departed with Florence, and Tom Dennis joined them at a glance from the latter. All three passed down the after companion.

In a wheeled chair set beside the stern windows of the cabin sat Miles Hathaway. He was not as Tom Dennis had seen him pictured, for his rocky and indomitable face was half-concealed by a growth of shaggy grey beard. His hair, too, had grown long and was streaked with grey. He sat motionless, hands in lap. His eyes, wide glowing brown eyes like those of Florence, were fastened upon the three who entered.

The meeting was pitiful almost to tragedy. With a wordless cry Florence ran to her father and knelt beside him, clasping him in her arms, her head against his broad and massive chest. The man sat there unstirring, helpless. His eyes seemed to lack the swift

play of cheek-muscles and lids which gives expression; yet, as those eyes dwelt upon the upturned face of Florence, they seemed to dilate with incredulous horror.

"We've brought your daughter, Cap'n Hathaway," announced Mrs. Pontifex stridently, "and her husband, Mr. Dennis."

The eyes of the helpless man turned to Dennis and rested upon his gaze. The mouth of Miles Hathaway opened; he tried terribly and frightfully to stir himself, to break the invisible bonds which held him tied down—and he failed. He could not speak or move. Yet his eyes, fastened upon the face of Dennis, seemed filled with some awful and momentous message.

"I'm so glad we've found you, Father dear!" said Florence softly, tears on her cheeks. "Tom and I are going to take care of you always, and if only Mother were here—she never knew that you were alive."

Again the mouth of Miles Hathaway opened spasmodically, but he could not speak.

His eyes were horrible to see, so dumbly eloquent were they of the useless will of the man. Tom Dennis could not bear the scene further, and touched the arm of Mrs. Pontifex.

"Leave them—for a little while."

The woman nodded. They left father and daughter together. The Missus led the way to the mess-cabin, where they found Pontifex opening a bottle of wine. Up above, feet were trampling the deck, and the brig was heeling a trifle.

"A real dinner!" exclaimed Pontifex heartily. "A real wedding dinner, eh? Mr. Leman has the deck, my dear, and he's called all hands; so for once we'll have a quiet family meal, eh? Where's Mrs. Dennis? Oh, with her father, of course. A sad meeting for her!"

"Yes. But for you, Captain Pontifex, there would have been none at all," said Dennis warmly. "We owe you a good deal——"

"There, there, don't mention it!" Pontifex gave his curled mustache a twirl, and his white teeth flashed out in a smile. "We'll have our pay, never fear, the Missus and I. Talk it over in the morning, eh? I suppose you're pretty familiar with your Dumas, Mr. Dennis? Well, well—a bother having to change our anchorage this way, but the port authorities know their business these war-times, of course. Well, sit down."

The dinner was excellent—although, owing to the motion of the ship, the dishes joggled more than a little. Captain Pontifex made light of it, explaining that they might not reach their new anchorage until midnight.

With the coffee was served a liqueur, the most peculiar and biting Tom Dennis had ever tasted. The skipper stated that it was a queer distillation made from flour and molasses by a Siberian Eskimo—quite a rarity. Perhaps it was this liqueur which made Tom Dennis most unaccountably sleepy;



indeed, he could hardly stumble off to the mate's cabin which had been assigned him and Florence. And as he retired, he could faintly hear the roaring bellow of Boatswain Joe somewhere on deck:

"She was waiting for a fair wind to get under way,  
A long time ago!"

The last vague thought of Tom Dennis was a mental query as to why Captain Pontifex had asked him if he were familiar with Dumas. He was to remember it later, also.

## CHAPTER VI

### OUTWARD BOUND

Upon the morning after the *Pelican* stood out of the Lion's Gate and headed southward, she was outside Cape Flattery and standing off to the northwest, bucking and pitching and leaning over under a stiff blow from the westward.

Captain Pontifex, although on this cruise he carried no third mate, adhered to the custom of whaling skippers and stood no watches himself except at times of necessity. On this fine morning, however, he was on the quarter-deck, talking with black Manuel Mendez. The steward approached them gingerly, for he was rather seasick.

"Well?" snapped the skipper. "How are they? Do they know we're at sea?"

"Yes, sir, they seem to, sir," returned

the Cockney. "Mr. Dennis is wery sick, sir. The lady, sir, is not."

"Taking care of him, is she?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, steward, you give them my compliments, and say that I expect them to appear in the saloon cabin at four bells sharp."

"Yes, sir."

"And, steward! You might ask the Missus for a bit of raw blubber. Eat it raw, steward, and it'll cure what's ailing you. Nice fat whale blubber——"

"Yes, sir," said the steward faintly, his cheeks turning green. He fled in haste.

Black Mendez grinned delightedly. "Dey'll be no good for fight, Cap'n."

The skipper merely laughed in his throat, and strode to the companion way. He had changed overnight. No longer was he under the shadow of the land, under the hand of port and civil and military authorities! No longer was he among the meshes of mankind's net! Here he was the master. Here he was

authority ultimate and supreme. Here, on the high seas, his word, and his alone, was law. He only dictated; all others obeyed! He was the skipper. He was absolute.

Something of all this showed in his eyes as he went below. At the foot of the ladder he met the Missus, rock-like and indomitable. She looked into his eyes and shrank slightly.

"At four bells," said Captain Pontifex curtly. "In the cabin—with him."

She nodded and looked after him as he swung away aft. She was afraid of him, but she was proud of him—was she not his woman? She, of whom all others aboard the *Pelican* were in dread, stood in fear of the skipper.

Captain Pontifex passed into the saloon at the stern, where the helpless Miles Hathaway sat in his chair beside the screwed-down cot that served him as a bunk. Despite the hardness and the harshness and the terror of the Missus' life, she was after all

a woman; the cabin ports were curtained with flowered chintz, the big gun-rack and the little bookcase were also curtained; in the corner near the stern ports was a heavy tea-jar lashed to the deck, in which blossomed a huge scarlet geranium plant. This geranium was the pride and joy of the Missus, and the envy and admiration of all visiting whaling skippers.

The skipper pulled up a chair in front of Miles Hathaway, stuffed tobacco into his pipe, struck a match and, through the ensuing cloud of smoke, fastened his keen dark eyes upon the staring gaze of the paralytic.

"Well," he observed, "I've got 'em, haven't I? Bit of a surprise, eh?"

It seemed as though some fearful inner convulsion swept over the helpless man. His mouth opened slightly; his eyelids jerked. But he could not speak.

Pontifex laughed. "Told you I'd make you talk, didn't I? We're off to sea at last,



Cap'n, and I've got her aboard. Also, her husband—she'll be a widow early, won't she? That is, if you're still stubborn. Well, I told you that I expected to go Dumas *père* one better, by the aid of modern science; but, my dear Miles, we must continue to stick to the old novelist a little while. So you'll kindly answer in the usual way when I ask questions."

For a moment Pontifex puffed at his pipe. Then he took from the table another pipe, filled it with tobacco, lighted it, and placed it between the teeth of Hathaway.

"Now we'll have a friendly little chat over our 'baccy, eh? Real old sailormen, eh?" He chuckled with horrible mockery. "At four bells, Cap'n, they'll come in here and we'll hold a meeting of the directorate. The Hathaway Salvage Company—how's that, eh? Sorry you're out of it. Do you remember that time in Vladivostok, when you met me on the street and cursed me back and forth for marooning those deserters

on an ice-floe? Well, I told you then that I'd get even, Miles. And now—*she* is at sea with me! Good joke, eh?"

The subtle horror-gleam in the eyes of Miles Hathaway was intensified. His massive face purpled, then paled again under its stubble of whitish beard.

"Bo'sun Joe slipped up in letting her get married," pursued Pontifex. "But we'll need her signature and that of her husband—or we'll so tell them. Savvy, Miles? We'll tell 'em that; we'll make it convincing, too. We'll make 'em quite certain that what we want is their signatures and their help. But you know better, Miles!"

"Yes, you know better. You know that I had to get the girl in order to make you talk, blast you! That's why I spent money getting her. That's why I got her. As for Dennis, we'll get rid of him later. He doesn't count."

Again Pontifex resumed his pipe, puffing it alight. He spoke smilingly, now—an

ugly smile that curved his lips. He leaned forward with a swift intent question.

"If it's hard to use your eyelids, Miles, answer with the pipe. Are you going to tell me where the *John Simpson* lays?"

Captain Hathaway sent a single spiral of smoke up-curling from his pipe.

"No?" Pontifex ceased to smile. "We've tried torturing you, Miles, and you're as stubborn a devil as I ever met. Do you want us to bring the girl in here and torture *her*—under your eyes? Hm! You remember Frenchy, who put the irons to your feet? Well—Frenchy has spoken for her. And Frenchy comes aboard at Unalaska.

"Now, Miles, if you give me the bearings of the *Simpson*, I'll put you and her and her man ashore at Unalaska, all shipshape. I give you my solemn word on it, and you know my word means something; whatever else I do, I don't break my word! By the time we reach Unalaska you'll understand pretty well how we're going to work on

things. The day we hit Unimak Pass I'll ask you once more—and only once. If you refuse, I'll set to work on the girl—or Frenchy will. You think it over, Miles. You think it over hard, blast you! Now that she's here, I'm going to *make* you talk!"

Pontifex knocked out his pipe and that of Hathaway. Then he went on deck.

In the meantime his good wife was visiting the Dennis cabin. Florence, for all her slim frailness, was untouched by *mal-de-mer*, and greeted the Missus smilingly. Tom Dennis, sitting on the lower bunk, managed a weak grin. He was rapidly growing better.

"The steward brought yeou breakfast?" said the Missus. "Is Mr. Dennis feeling better?"

"Quite, I think," responded Florence. "Surely we're not at sea?"

Mrs. Pontifex nodded. "Oh, yes, we're well aoutside Flattery."

"And what are we doing there?" demanded Tom Dennis in surprise.

"Making abaout nine knots," coolly returned the Missus, transfixing him with her deep cold eyes. "Never mind discussing it naow. If yeou folks will show up in the cabin at four bells, we'll talk it aout!"

"But what does it mean?" Florence, a little pale, laid her hand upon the woman's arm. Her eyes searched the rocklike features with anxious pleading. "Won't you please tell me? There's nothing wrong?"

"Nothing wrong at all, dearie." Mrs. Pontifex patted the girl's hand and smiled a flinty smile. "It means money in all our pockets, that's what it means—aye, in yours, too! So don't think too hard of us for running off to sea with yeou young folks until ye know all abaout it.

"And naow, dearie, I have to do the cooking, because that blasted cook of ours went ashore and didn't show up again.



Taking care of your poor father has 'baout worn me daown, and I know yeou'll be willing to look after him a bit——"

"Of course! I meant to speak to you about it before this!" exclaimed Florence.

"If you'll show me——"

"Come right along with me. He ain't much trouble, poor man, and it's the least we can do to make him comfortable. If there's anything yeou want done, too, just call steward and tell him."

"We'll be back soon, Tom dear," said Florence, and departed with Mrs. Pontifex.

When the door closed, Tom Dennis sat motionless for a moment, then raised his head. He slipped to the deck and stood upright, holding to the bunk. A slow smile crept into his chalky features, and presently he stretched himself luxuriantly.

"Passing off! I'm bad, but not near so bad as I might be," he commented audibly.

It's a good thing for me that I was raised n the Maine coast, and know ships and

the sea as well as anybody! They don't know it, however, and Florence won't tell. Now, why the deuce have they kidnapped us this way?"

Frowning he sipped some cold coffee from a pot left by the steward an hour earlier. Then he went to his huge trunk of a grip, its telescopic sides fat almost to bursting, which lay at the head of the bunk.

He unlocked the big grip and opened it. Then he discarded his shirt and collar, the same which he had worn the preceding day, and slipped into a grey flannel shirt which he took from the suitcase. His tie knotted about the collar, he returned to the grip and knelt above it. Drawing forth some clothes, he threw them carelessly on the floor—threw out more, until a pile of rumpled garments lay beside him. Then he produced a large flat package and two small ones. He opened these, disclosing six large phonograph records, a reproducer, and a box of needles. Then, from within

the suitcase he lifted out a small hornless phonograph itself. He stared down at it and chuckled.

"I told Ericksen the truth when I said I'd given that square suitcase to the porter," he reflected, as he fitted the reproducer to the machine. "But I didn't mention that I'd kept the things in the suitcase."

Just why he had done this, Tom Dennis was by no means certain, except that his suspicions of Ericksen had never quite downed. It was very curious that the sole baggage of the assassin had consisted of this phonograph outfit. Bo'sun Joe's interest in the matter was also curious; his presence in the compartment belonging to the assassin had never ceased to trouble Tom Dennis. More than he cared to admit, Dennis suspected that there was, or had been, some definite relation, and by no means an unfriendly one, between Ericksen and the would-be murderer.

And why had that man possessed nothing

except this phonograph and six grand-opera records? Dennis wanted to try out those records. He strongly hoped that the labels might be a blind—that the records might have some information to convey. Did those records hold the secret, then?

Dennis wound up the machine, inserted a needle in the slot, and set one of the records upon the turntable. To his complete and utter stupefaction he found that upon the record was not a word; merely a deep bass voice repeating the alphabet over and over in a slow and distinct sequence! After each letter "zed", followed the numerals from one to naught.

One after another, Dennis tried each of the six records, patiently listening to that maddening repetition of that alphabet. There was positively nothing else on them!

At length he glanced at his watch, found that it was nearly ten o'clock, or four bells. With no little disdain and disappointment,

he bundled the phonograph and records back into the depths of his suitcase, and was just locking the grip when Florence entered the cabin.

"Are you ready, dear?" she demanded eagerly, a spot of colour in her pale cheeks. "They're all waiting for us there in the cabin—and, Tom! It's a company! The Hathaway Salvage Company!"

"And what does that mean?" asked Dennis smiling as he kissed her.

"They're going to tell us. Are you better, dear?"

"Oh, I'm all right—able to walk, anyhow. Forward, and solve the mystery!"

Together they left their cabin and went aft.

In company with Miles Hathaway and the tall scarlet geranium in the green-striped jar, they found five people sitting around the table. At the head was Captain Pontifex, at the foot the Missus. On one side sat Mr. Leman, pawing his fringe of whiskers.



At the other sat Ericksen, a satanic twist to his freckled mouth as he eyed Captain Hathaway, and at his side the black boat-steerer, Corny.

For a wonder, Pontifex rose as Florence entered the room, the others following his example. The skipper indicated two chairs placed beside Leman.

"Will you sit down, please? I have the pleasure of introducing our officers, except Mr. Mendez, who has the deck. Mr. Leman, our second mate; you know Ericksen, I think, and Corny. This chair, Mrs. Dennis—thank you. I might add that we are the officers and directors of the Hathaway Salvage Company of which I am president, Mrs. Pontifex, treasurer; Mr. Leman, secretary—the other gentlemen directors."

Dennis, feeling rather helpless and bewildered, sank into the chair beside Florence.

"For our own protection"—the skipper twirled his moustache—"we have been forced to maintain silence until we were at sea.

Were it known that Captain Miles Hathaway were alive, a fortune would be lost to us all; this one fact will explain many questions which may have perplexed you, Mr. Dennis."

"A few things need explanation, all right," said Dennis.

"Conceded!" The skipper smiled. "I may add that we are not bound for the whaling grounds, and we are not upon a whaling cruise, as everyone has imagined. For that reason we have shipped Kanakas for'ard; they are faithful good seamen, and ask no questions. Neither they nor the other fo'c'sle hands, of course, are in this company of ours."

"And what is the purpose of the company, then?" asked Florence quickly.

"It may be very briefly stated in one word: salvage! Your father's ship, the *John Simpson*, was lost at sea with all hands. But the natives who brought your poor father into Unalaska told a story

of having found him upon the shore of an island, doubtless one of the Aleuts; and under the lee of that island they had seen a wreck in water so shallow that her masts stuck out above the surface. That wreck was the *Simpson*.

"You may know that the majority of those islands are deserted, waterless, good for nothing. Not even a Jap sealing poacher would observe the masts of a wreck, unless by chance he came to the spot. We may take it for granted that the *Simpson* has never been found. Unfortunately, the natives who brought in Captain Hathaway gave no exact location and disappeared almost at once."

Tom Dennis leaned forward. "But why salvage a ship that's been wrecked? She's of no earthly good! And her cargo will belong to the owners."

"Not so. She has been taken off the register!" Captain Pontifex showed his white teeth in a smile of perfect confidence.

"The point is this, Mr. Dennis: the ship was lost while *en route* to Vladivostok, laden with supplies for Russia. Those supplies consisted of machine-guns almost entirely; of machine-guns and ammunition.

"Water will not have harmed that cargo, Mr. Dennis—or if so, only slightly. I have taken pains to ascertain that the guns were so wrapped as to be waterproof. The value runs up close to a million and a half of dollars. The inference is plain, eh?"

Tom Dennis sat back, stunned. The inference was plain indeed—a million and a half to be had for the picking up!

## CHAPTER VII

### JERRY TELLS SOMETHING

As in a daze, Tom Dennis listened while Pontifex went on to explain that Miles Hathaway alone knew where the *Simpson* lay; that thus far they had been unable to find a way to extract that knowledge from Hathaway—just here the skipper's voice was very silky—and that they counted upon Florence to hit upon some method of communication.

But, the skipper hastened on, this was not the real reason for Florence's having been fetched in person. She was the legal heir of Hathaway, and also his guardian, under the present conditions.

"Of course," said Pontifex blandly, "we might have gone ahead and you would never have known about it; but we don't do business



that way, Mrs. Dennis. We want to be aboveboard and honourable in the matter. We dared not thresh the thing out there in the harbour, for you've no idea how curious shipping people are! A breath of suspicion as to our real business, and we'd have been lost. So we simply ran away with you—not a bad joke, eh? Ran away with you to make your fortune!

"Well, to business. Our proposition is that you sign articles with us—Mr. Dennis also, since he is your husband and we want everything shipshape—and we'll land you at Unalaska, there to wait until we've turned the trick. Of course, you realize that we're giving our time, the wages of the men, the ship, and all the rest, to the venture. We've talked over what's fair, and we think that the right thing to do is to offer you twenty per centum of the gross proceeds of the salvage. Is that agreeable?"

Florence, her wide brown eyes fastened upon Tom Dennis, seemed to await his decision

in breathless eagerness. He nodded, without speaking.

Captain Pontifex produced a paper which must have been long prepared, for it was typed, and handed it to Dennis. The latter glanced it over. The writing was no more than an agreement to the terms as Pontifex had outlined them: Dennis passed the paper to Florence.

"Pontifex," he said slowly, "you're white in this thing! I tell you we appreciate it. Yes, I can understand a good many things now that weren't clear to me before. Your offer is generous. It's eminently square. We're not rich, and if this thing goes through it'll mean a great deal to us—and to the future comfort of Captain Hathaway."

Florence hastily signing the paper with the fountain pen which the skipper had handed her, shoved pen and paper at Dennis then leaped to her feet. An excited smile upon her lips, her great brown eyes glowing with life and eagerness, she insisted on shaking

hands with everyone at the table. Her slender frame seemed filled with a sudden flame of vitality.

"You've made me so happy!" she cried, speaking then to Pontifex. "Not the money, not alone what it will mean to us all—but your goodness! All of you! Oh, if father could only tell you how he must feel about it——"

She flung her arms around Mrs. Pontifex and kissed that lady heartily.

Up the craggy countenance of the Missus welled a slow tide of crimson, which swiftly waned again. Corny looked at Boastwain Joe and grinned. The deep-set, cavernous eyes of Captain Pontifex sought the impassively watching face of Miles Hathaway—sought it with a satiric gleam in their dark depths. Then they returned to the girl.

"Duty is duty," he said unctuously. "We've tried to do what's right, madam. The consciousness of having done right is a great stay in time of trouble. We——"

The words were cut short by an appalling scream which seemed to wail out of the air overhead. At that scream a silence like death fell upon the cabin.

Corny furtively crossed himself. Mr. Leman's flat ugly face turned quite white. Ericksen flung back his chair and was gone with a rush. Captain Pontifex leaped to his feet and followed Boastwain Joe to the companion. As he set foot on the ladder, the others crowding at his heels, the brig heeled over amid a confused trampling and shouting from above. Florence cried out in fear.

Manuel Mendez was helping a Kanaka at the wheel, jamming it hard down, bringing the brig slowly about; he was bawling orders, while all hands were trimming sail.

"One o' dem lubbers fell off de royal yard!" bellowed Mendez at the skipper. He did not think it necessary to explain that, as a good joke, he had sent one of the drink-dazed white hands up to the royal,

inning delightedly as the poor devil shivered and clung in fright above the swimming waste of water. But another of the white men forward had seen.

"It was him done it!" yelled the man angrily, pointing at Mendez. "He shifted the helm to——"

Boatswain Joe's fist stopped the utterance, sent the man rolling into the scuppers.

"Get out that for'ard boat, Bo'sun!" shouted Captain Pontifex, his voice piercing the wind as steel pierces paper. "Lively, lively—lively!"

Tom Dennis stood at the top of the companionway, his arm about Florence. Beside them stood the Missus, rocklike and silent. Dennis had caught those words from forward, had seen Ericksen's blow; he stood grimly watching, his lips compressed.

Mr. Leman, with uncanny swiftness, joined Boatswain Joe at the forward whaleboat. It was quickly swung out and lowered, the manakias tumbling into it, Leman and



Ericksen following. Behind, somewhere in the tossing sea crests, was the black dot of a man's head. Before the boat was half-way to it, the head had vanished. The man was gone.

"Be a little more careful with those men Mr. Mendez," said Pontifex, watching the whaleboat put about and return. "We'll need 'em."

That was all. No anger, no inquiry, no more concern over the death of a man—the needless brutal murder of a man—than if that man had been a wandering sea-gull. Tom Dennis drew Florence below, hoping that she had not understood. But when he looked into her eyes, he knew that she *had* understood.

"Tom, I—can't believe it!" she said faintly, horror in her wide brown eyes. "He spoke as though—it didn't matter."

Dennis made light of the affair. "Never mind, dear. We don't know all the circumstances, and of course the skipper can't blame his mate in public. It would hurt discip-

line. Just try and forget it, and not refer to it."

The girl shivered. "I can't forget that awful scream!"

No further reference was made to the affair, beyond the skipper's explaining, later, that an unavoidable lurch of the ship had caused the accident. But it was long before Florence could look upon Manuel Mendez, when he joined them at mess, without changing countenance. There was something dreadful in the grinning calm of the black Portuguese. His eternal good humour was ominous.

"We mustn't let little outside matters affect us," said Tom Dennis that same night. The main point, Florence, so far as we're concerned, is your father, and the way Pontifex and his company are acting."

"I know, Tom, dear," she said. "They've been very good."

He sensed a constraint in her air, but put down to the accident.

Two days later, however, the inquietude within him, which had been lulled to sleep by that meeting of the company, was awakened with terrible swiftness. He had been discussing with Pontifex how to get into communication with Miles Hathaway, and the skipper professed himself quite helpless in the matter, leaving it entirely to Florence's ingenuity.

The lack of concern which Pontifex expressed struck Tom Dennis as being unnatural, under the circumstances. But a little later, as Dennis stood in talk with Mr. Leman, who was discussing whaling voyages, he squinted up at the sails.

"Better trim your yards a bit, hadn't you?" said Dennis thoughtlessly. "Looks as if you were losing a good bit of that wind, Mr. Leman."

The mate started slightly.

"Where'd you learn so much about sails, Mr. Dennis?"

"Oh, I just picked it up," Dennis laughed.

"But if you're in a hurry to reach Unalaska, I should think you'd trim sail a bit."

"Orders were to keep her as she is," said Leman curtly, and turned away.

Dennis shrugged his shoulders. It was none of his business how the ship was run, and if Pontifex had reasons for not hurrying, well and good.

Meantime, the silent and motionless Miles Hathaway sat in the cabin, puffing sometimes at the pipe Florence filled for him, watching her as she worked, with unmoving terrible eyes. Tom helped her take care of him, and always it seemed to Dennis that Hathaway was mutely struggling to express something. Once Dennis got out a chart and attempted to locate the wreck.

"Watch my finger, Captain Hathaway," he directed. "If I get 'warm', as the kids used to say, open your mouth."

The effort was fruitless, for although Dennis traced his fingers over the entire

line of the Aleuts, Miles Hathaway remained unmoving. In the end, Dennis began to think that the man either did not understand, or possessed a brain as dead as his body. At times, too, the paralytic was almost unable to open his mouth or to swallow. His lips had no independent motion. To communicate with him seemed impossible.

It was the third evening following the meeting in the cabin. Tom and Florence had put Hathaway to bed, and after bidding the skipper and his wife good night, went on deck for a breath of air. Mendez had the deck. Wishing to avoid the black mate, Florence led the way forward to the lee of the brick try-works. There Tom Dennis lighted his pipe, and for a little they sat together in silence, under the strangely soothing yet invigorating influence of the slapping sails and the rushing foam-crested rollers that roared under the lee-rail.

Suddenly a figure appeared coming from aft, preceded by a whimpering snuffle. It



was Jerry, the moon-faced cabin boy, and he was blubbering away with the subdued racking sobs of a boy.

"Hello, Jerry!" said Dennis. "What's the trouble?"

Jerry peered at them and rubbed his eyes.

"The Missus whaled me; then *he* chipped in and kicked the back off'm me, drat him!"

"What'd you do, Jerry?"

"Nothin' at all!" responded the boy defiantly. "The mate sent me down to clean his cabin, an' they didn't know I was there, an' the door was open. He says it's a hell of a note about Frenchy not bringin' that phonygraft, and it was the best idea ever was, and she says yes, maybe we'd better give the old son of a gun another taste of hot iron. He says no, there ain't no need of that, because we got the bulge on him now and he'll talk in a hurry, knowin' she's aboard, and it's all Bo'sun's fault for slippin' up and lettin' Frenchy slip up that way. Just then they heard me, and she whaled me and

he kicked me up the ladder. Drat him! I wisht I was off'm this old ship!"

Jerry passed on forward, sniffing.

Tom Dennis stood very still. He felt Florence draw herself up; he caught a startled gasp from her lips; but he was thinking with a wild sickening surety, of what the skipper had said. Frenchy—and the phonograph!

There was the missing link. No use disguising the facts any longer; no use trying to cover up what was only too obvious! Frenchy—that was the assassin; and Ericksen *had* been in partnership with him, there in Chicago! And Hathaway would talk now that Florence was aboard——

Tom Dennis shivered suddenly. "Come, dear!" he said in a strange voice "Come below. I have something to tell you."

He felt that she was sobbing softly, and halted. "What's the matter, Florence?"

She only shook her head, and taking his

arm accompanied him to the companionway. Dennis was alarmed by her attitude; upon reaching their own cabin she threw her arms about him, a sudden paroxysm of sobs shaking her whole body. Dennis could obtain no response to his queries for a moment, until the girl suddenly looked up into his eyes.

"I—I couldn't tell you before, Tom! I thought perhaps it had been the wreck, and all that," she said, brokenly. "But poor father—his feet were burned, and his arms—at least, I know now that the scars were of burns! You heard what Jerry said. And father's eyes are giving him a lot of trouble; sometimes he can't use them at all, and it seems to hurt him when they're open. I—I can't dare to think that anyone would have deliberaely hurt him——"

"Good Lord!" broke from Dennis. "It's not credible! Yet, if Frenchy was my Chicago visitor—here, old girl, sit down! I've something to tell you. I can't quite

face the meaning of it—yet it's bound to mean but one thing——”

He drew the wondering sobbing girl to a chair beside him, and for the first time told her of his strange assailant in Chicago on the night of their departure. He connected up the links—finding Ericksen in the man's compartment; the square suitcase and its contents—and now the remarks of Pontifex about that phonograph, as reported by the innocent Jerry.

As she listened, the apprehension and grief of Florence for the helpless and seemingly tortured father began to be absorbed in the deep significance of the entire affair. She sat in frowning thought, while Dennis drew from his memory the little things which at the time he had scarce noted, but which now seemed so laden with significance—even the strange unconcern of Pontifex over communicating with Miles Hathaway. At this last, Florence lifted her head.

“I know—the same thing struck me,

Tom. I was talking about it with Mrs. Pontifex to-day; she had the air of discouraging me in the attempt. Why? Why don't they want us to communicate with poor father? It will be hard at best, because of his eyes; I'm going to make up an eyewash for him until we can reach a doctor. But why their attitude? Everything seemed so honest and so kindly at that meeting the other day! And when I kissed Mrs. Pontifex \_\_\_\_\_"

"She blushed, by George!" snapped Dennis suddenly. "And anything that could make that woman blush—here, let me think! Jerry gave the whole game away to us. The clue lies in what the skipper said about your father talking now that you were aboard——"

He broke off abruptly, filled and lighted his pipe, and sat staring before him. Not for nothing had he followed the newspaper game. Not for nothing had he been one of the best



rewrite men in Chicago! He had been trained in the business of making a whole cloth from scattered scraps.

"Got it! Listen here, Florence," he said suddenly. "Pontifex found your father, and either took him to a house, where those snapshots were made, or to this ship—no matter which. Face facts, now! All this goody-goody talk is bluff. Pontifex was busy trying to extort the secret of the *Simpson's* position from your father, so he sent Boatswain Joe to get you; and he sent that clever little assassin, Frenchy, to get this phonograph that's in my grip—why, we don't know. But for some reason he wanted it, and wanted it badly!

"Ericksen did not want me to accompany you. He called in Frenchy at the last minute to put me out of the way—and Frenchy meant murder. There's a salient fact! How did Boatswain Joe slip up, as Pontifex termed it? In not bringing you alone. They wanted you—alone! A second salient

fact. Why? Pontifex has said it: in order to force your father to talk!"

"But Tom!" broke in Florence quickly. "Father can't talk!"

"All bluff. Pontifex can communicate with him, somehow. They simply didn't want us to do so."

"But that's why they wanted *me*! And then, my signature on that paper——"

"More bluff!" flung out Dennis. "They tortured your father—don't shrink from it—and he would not tell the secret. They got you aboard and sailed, knowing that for your sake, to get you out of their power, your father would give up anything. I'm a mere incident, an incumbrance. They're not hurrying. They want Frenchy to reach Unalaska first and come aboard there. I'd recognize him again, which would spoil their game at this juncture."

"They don't mean to land us there?" She spoke steadily, but her face was pale.

"I doubt it. They'll try to get rid of me

there. They may take you and your father along, to be sure that they get the right position from him. The ultimate outcome would be probably of no danger to you—they'd sell the salvaged stuff to Japan or Canada or China, and would land you wherever they went. They might even keep the signed agreement—in part. They'd give you enough money to make it inadvisable for you to start any legal proceedings, as they have your agreement to the terms, and you'll never know how much they get for the salvage. You understand? If your father gives them the correct position of the wreck, you are possibly in no danger."

"And you, Tom?"

Dennis grinned. "They want me out of the way. They think I'll make trouble. Well, I *know* I will! Don't you worry about me. They'll do nothing until Unalaska and the revenue cutter are left behind, see? And by that time, little Tommy will have spoiled their game."

"How?" demanded Florence, her eyes anxious.

"Don't know yet," said Dennis cheerfully. "If I——"

"Tom! What was it that Pontifex said to you about reading Dumas? Why, I know just what they got that phonograph for—oh, I wish I'd known about it!"

"You do? What?"

"Don't you remember in one of the Dumas novels there was a paralytic, and they made him blink his eyelids twice for 'No' and once for 'Yes'? I was thinking about it only this afternoon, and meant to try it with father! And those phonograph records, with the alphabet and numerals on them—don't you see? Play a record and father would wink at the right letter of figure until he spelled out a word——"

"By George!" Dennis stared at the flushed and excited girl. "By George! You've hit it square on the head—and I never thought of it! We'll try it to-morrow——"

Florence leaned forward, colour glowing in her pale face, her eyes dilated by swift excitement and resolution, yet dominated by their strangely poised radiance. All her spirit shone in her eyes—all her heritage of soul, her heritage of iron nature, tempered and alloyed and refined to an almost dangerous degree by her womanhood. Tom Dennis gazed into her eyes and wondered, as he had wondered on that memorable afternoon when she had said: "We'll only win by daring; so we shall dare everything!"

"No, Tom!" she said firmly. "Not the phonograph! They must not know that we have it, or they'll know that we suspect their whole game! In the morning I'll corroborate your theory from father's lips—the way that Dumas' story did. We have two or three more days until we reach Unalaska. In that time don't dare give them any suspicion! Watch everything; but say nothing.

"Before we reach Unalaska we'll formulate a plan of action between us. They have



bitterly wronged us; they have lied to us; they've tried to murder us. And we'll fight them! Do you agree?"

Tom Dennis laughed suddenly and kissed her on the lips.

"You bet!" he said deeply. "We'll fight!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### MILES HATHAWAY TALKS

Close upon noon the following day, moon-faced Jerry was heading for the after cabins, broom in hand, with intent to sweep up the mess cabin. Manuel Mendez, who had the deck, playfully whipped out his sheath-knife, and pretended to dive for Jerry. With a howl of terror, the boy slashed the mate's shins with the broom-handle—a wild blow.

“Leave go o’ me, you nigger!” he howled, as the hand of Mendez caught his collar.

“Who you call nigger? Me?” demanded Manuel Mendez angrily. “What you t’ink dis ship be, huh? You say ‘sir’ to de mate, queeck!”

One giant black hand encircling the boy's throat; Mendez laughed and choked him

until Jerry's face was purple. Then, having heard the desired "sir", Mendez flung Jerry at the companionway which swallowed him from sight.

At the bottom of the ladder, Jerry perceived Captain Pontifex bearing his instruments and going above for the noon observation. Jerry sidled into the nearest cabin and hid. He knew that the Missus was up forward in the galley, safely engaged in getting dinner.

Thus it happened that when Florence went swiftly to the stern cabin, and Tom Dennis stood upon the companion ladder to give her warning of any approaching danger from above, neither of them knew that moon-faced Jerry was fearfully waiting and listening inside the cabin of Mendez, the door slightly ajar. And that cabin adjoined the stern cabin.

"Father—can you wink your eyelids once for 'yes' and twice for 'no'? Quickly!"

Florence stood before the immobile figure

of her father, watching him with anxious desperate eyes. The eyes of Miles Hathaway winked—very slowly, very slightly, but very perceptibly. Was it chance or design?

"Have you given the position of the wreck to Captain Pontifex?" breathed the girl. Her father's eyes closed twice. A sudden glory shone in her face, as she realized that this was no accident—that she was communicating with her father at last!

"You heard all that passed at the meeting here," she hurried on. "Was he sincere in what he said? Does he mean to keep his promises to us?"

The eyelids of the paralytic fluttered twice.

"Have they harmed you?"

"Yes."

"Can we trust anyone aboard here?"

No answer. Evidently Hathaway was not sure upon this point.

"Have they any intentions of harming me?"

"Yes."

"They have! And Tom too?"

"Yes. Yes." Repeated, this time, manifestly for emphasis. The girl paled slightly.

"Will they harm us before we reach Unalaska?"

"No."

Tom Dennis began to whistle cheerily. Florence, who had filled her father's pipe, put it between his lips and held a match while he puffed. As she did so, the door behind her was flung open, and into the cabin came Tom, propelling before him the cabin boy Jerry.

"Heard everything you said, Florence," said Dennis, surveying the shrinking boy. "Now, Jerry, what d'you mean by spying on us? Who set you in there to listen?"

"Nobody." Jerry began to blubber. "But that nigger Mendez kicked me downstairs, and I seen *him* comin', and I ducked in there. I didn't mean to hear nothin', honest! And I won't tell them, neither, if ye let me go. Don't whale me!"



"Lord, Jerry, I wouldn't hurt you!" said Dennis; but he frowned as he spoke. He looked at Florence and gestured helplessly. If the boy told—their game was done!

"Jerry," said the girl, suddenly stooping and kissing the gaping boy, "do you like Captain Pontifex?"

"No, I don't! I hate him! And if we ever get anywhere, I'm going to run away."

"He hates us, Jerry. Do you want to go away from this ship with us?"

"You bet, ma'am. Can I?"

"If you don't say a word to anyone about what you just heard. If you do, Mr. Dennis and I will suffer, and you'll get no chance to run away."

"Cross m'heart, ma'am." And Jerry earnestly suited action to word. A sudden excitement shone in his eyes. "They've double-crossed you all the time. I know; I've heard 'em talk! They're goin' to give you to that man Frenchy, that used to be

cook. I never seen him, but they talk about him lots."

"All right, Jerry," said Dennis hastily. "Beat it before the skipper comes back."

The boy fled. Dennis looked at the flushed hurt face of Florence.

"Give me—to that man!" she said faintly. "Oh! It—it's impossible——"

"Right, old girl—it's quite impossible." Dennis made a gesture of caution, as he heard the sound of steps from the passage. "You leave it to me, that's all. I'm sorry you heard that, Florence; but it'll be all right. Better take that pipe from your father, or we'll forget it. Eight bells just struck and we'd better run along to dinner."

The skipper entered, with a smiling nod and twirl of his moustache.

"Unalaska day after to-morrow, if the wind hold," he announced, his deep-set eyes sitting from face to face as if seeking secrets there. "All's well?"

"All well and hungry, skipper." Dennis turned to the door. "Coming?"

"Not for five minutes. I want to jot down these figures and work out our position."

During the meal which ensued, Tom Dennis marvelled at the manner in which Florence maintained her cool poise, with never a token to indicate the terrific ordeal to which she had so lately been subjected. And little Jerry, his moon-face white and frightened, served the table with an occasional adoring glance at the girl; the danger from Jerry was palpably eliminated.

To dare risk further conversation with Miles Hathaway would be unadvisable, Dennis realized. Discussing the matter with Florence that afternoon, he found all traces of excitement gone from her; she was coolly alert, and much better poised than was Dennis himself. Fury was so deep and strong within him that it was difficult for him to restrain his passion; but Florence had become quite cool and dispassionate.

"It is quite clear, Tom," she said quietly, "that we must get father off this ship at Unalaska. If the revenue cutter is there, you had better interview the commander, tell exactly what has happened, and have father placed ashore. If the revenue cutter is not there, the port authorities——"

"Will probably be too slow to act," put in Dennis. "And there's another thing—this ship has diving equipment aboard, with all things necessary for the work in hand. I want to go after the wreck of the *Simpson*, Florence: I believe that Pontifex will be only too glad to set us all ashore at Unalaska provided he could get the location of that wreck."

"But he wouldn't trust father to give him the correct location. He'd hold us, or hold father, as hostages."

Dennis nodded, frowningly. After a moment he rose.

"Dear, please go to your father at once. Tell him that it is absolutely essential that

he give Pontifex the correct location of that wreck. Tell him that I shall handle the entire matter in such a way that Pontifex will ultimately get his just desserts; but for the present it is necessary that Pontifex should not suspect us."

"And you, Tom? What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to see the skipper—I think he's on deck. If your father consents to do as I request, please call us at once."

Dennis hurried out to the companionway, and ascended to the deck.

Pontifex was there, indeed—tall and cavernous, caressing his curled black moustache while he talked with Mr. Leman. Dennis approached them with his heartiest manner.

"Well, gentlemen, good news!" he said warmly. "Do you remember, Captain, mentioning Dumas to me when we came aboard? That gave us an idea, and I believe that Mrs. Dennis will be able to communicate with her father. In fact, I expect her to



call us down there at any moment to get the location of that wreck. Pretty good, eh?"

Mr. Leman rubbed his broken nose. The skipper gave Dennis a sharp look, then forced a smile.

"Why, certainly, Mr. Dennis! Very glad indeed to hear it. The means?"

"By Captain Hathaway's winking his eyes in response to certain questions. Simple, if we'd only thought about it, eh? And, Captain, Mrs. Dennis and I both think that when we reach Unalaska she had better be put ashore there with her father. She's rather worried over his condition, and she'd be able to secure comforts ashore which can't be had here."

Pontifex nodded absently. His pallid features looked very uneasy.

"Then you'd go on with us?" he asked after a moment.

"Of course!" assented Dennis heartily. "Don't you want me?"

"You bet we do!" returned the skipper

fervently, his face clearing. "We'll need every man aboard when the work begins."

"Good—then it's settled!" exclaimed Dennis. "When do we make Unimak Pass?"

"To-morrow night," spoke up Mr. Leman, and fell to discussing the weather.

Five minutes later Florence appeared on deck, smiled and nodded brightly as the two officers touched their caps, and approached them with well-assumed eagerness.

"I can talk with father!" she exclaimed as though the discovery were fresh. "Come, down, gentlemen! He knows exactly what I'm saying, Tom, and winks once for 'yes' and twice for 'no'! I asked if he'd give us the exact location of the wreck, and he said 'yes'; so I came to call you at once."

"Excellent, Mrs. Dennis! I congratulate you" exclaimed the skipper. "Mr. Leman cannot leave the deck. I'll call Mr. Mendez as we go down. Well, well, Mrs. Dennis! Your husband was just telling us of the method

of communication. Quite ingenious, quite! By the way, have you seen Mrs. Pontifex?"

Mr. Leman, who entirely disregarded the conventional title of the lady, sang out in quick response:

"The Missus is up for'ard in the galley. Ahoy, Corny! Pass up the word for the Missus!"

So the word was "passed up", and the large figure of Mrs. Pontifex appeared near the try-works as Florence descended the companion ladder. With the Missus at the end of the procession, the others passed on into the stern cabin, the skipper knocking at the door of Manuel Mendez *en route* and commanding his immediate presence.

"Best do this all shipshape," suggested the skipper, when they stood before and around the immobile figure of Miles Hathaway. "I'll get out a chart, Mrs. Dennis——"

Pontifex searched his chart locker and did not find the desired chart until Manuel Mendez appeared, smiling his eternal and

monstrous grin. Then Pontifex produced a chart of the Aleutian Islands.

"Now, ma'am," he addressed Florence, "while I read off the figures to your poor old father, you stand by to watch for the answers. All ready? Good. Let's take up the latitude first—easier to determine the position that way. Now, is the position north of fifty-four?"

"No," returned Florence almost at once.

"Hm! That cuts out everything north o' Dutch Harbour, eh? North of fifty-two?"

"No," answered Florence.

"Good enough, ma'am. Now let's take up the longitude. West from Greenwich?"

"Yes."

"Between one seventy-four and seventy-eight?"

"No."

"Between one seventy-eight and eighty?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Florence.

"Getting warm, eh?" Pontifex spoke eagerly, a tinge of red in his pale cheeks. "Ah!

It's among that clump of islands south-east of Tanaga. Now, Mr. Hathaway, kindly follow my pencil from island to island with your eyes, this way——"

The skipper slowly passed the point of a pencil from one barren rock island to another. A swift cry from Florence checked him; holding his pencil, he gazed steadily at Miles Hathaway.

"Is this it?" he demanded, a sudden ring of steel in his tone. "This one—the most southerly of the rocks to the eastward of Kavalga?"

The gaze of one and all centred upon Miles Hathaway who for a moment met the level gaze of Pontifex with unmoving eyes. Then, slowly, Hathaway signified "Yes".

A deep breath filled the cabin; but the tense attitude of Pontifex did not change. He held his eyes steadily upon those of Hathaway. His voice came like a challenge, steely and commanding.

"Is that the correct position, Captain



Hathaway—upon your word of honour?"

"Yes," signalled Hathaway immediately.

Captain Pontifex turned. He rolled up the chart and tossed it upon the table.

"Hathaway's word is as good as my own—and that means *good*," he said quietly. "Now, Mrs. Dennis, am I correct in believing that you wish to be set ashore with your father at Unalaska?"

"Yes." Florence looked at him, smiling. "I'll be sorry to miss the salvage work, Captain Pontifex, but I'd like to obtain medical aid for my father, and to care for him ashore in person. He's more important to me than any money, you understand?"

"Of course." And Pontifex nodded.

The Missus was watching him in unconcealed surprise, while Mendez had ceased entirely to smile. This was their first hint about setting anyone ashore. Pontifex caressed his moustache and glanced at them, his deep-set eyes ironic.

"Mrs. Dennis and Captain Hathaway shall

be set ashore at Unalaska," he said. "Mr. Dennis goes with us as their representative, to take part in the work on the *Simpson*. I think that concludes our meeting."

Five minutes later, in the privacy of their own cabin, Florence faced Tom Dennis, her hands on his shoulders.

"Dear, I had hard work to make father consent," she said quietly. "But he yielded to my love and utter confidence in you. Now tell me—why did you do it? Do you really mean to go alone with these men, on this ship?"

Dennis filled his pipe, stooped to kiss her lips, then struck a match.

"I most certainly do, my dear. The chances are a thousand to one that the revenue cutter will not be in Unalaska Bay. In that event, you and your father will go ashore, while I shall sail with the *Pelican*. You'll take my big grip ashore, containing that phonograph and records. By this means your

father can tell his entire story to the proper authorities. That will take time, of course, and it will take time to summon the revenue cutter, even by wireless.

"I believe that under the circumstances, an oath can be administered to your father in a perfectly legal manner. You know the position of the wreck. With your father's story as a basis for action you can go to work in a proper manner with the authorities; whatever charges your father lays against Pontifex can be sworn to; your own signature to the agreement with Pontifex was obtained by fraud and deceit.

"You understand? Do nothing in a hurry. Give us a clear two weeks in which to get this ship loaded with the salvaged stuff. Then get sharp quick action, file a libel, or whatever the term is to denote an attachment of the ship. Sue Pontifex heavily in both your father's name and in ours, and claim whatever he has salvaged in your own name. We'll grab his ship and his salvaged

stuff at one swoop, see? While that's going through the courts, we will gut the *John Simpson* of all that's left in her. There's a newspaper man in Vancouver named Margate; I'll give you cables to send off to him. He'll doubtless be able to get backing and to charter some kind of an old tub—and while Pontifex is in the courts with us, Margate will be looting the *Simpson*, before the general public gets wise to where the *John Simpson* is lying. See?"

The eyes of the girl were large with wonder-admiration, and delight. Then fear struck into their depths.

"The plan is wonderful, Tom! But you—in the meantime?"

Dennis grinned. "Me? I'll be jollying old Pontifex along, never fear!"

## CHAPTER IX

### UNALASKA BAY

Unalaska—at last!

The tortuous, narrow and even precipitous passage, winding nearly two miles amid the rocks, lay behind, and now the good ship *Pelican* was swinging to her anchor in front of the little town hardly more than a village. In the little bight was no other large craft, although several fishing boats were rocking to their moorings.

The Arctic summer, intense and vivid as though to make up for its brief duration, was at an end. None the less, the breeze from the shore carried a sweet fragrance of flowers, the little town was still radiant with blossoming gardens, and all over the hills which lay banked around the town there were patches of gay flowers and the deep lush green of rank grasses.



With great care Miles Hathaway and his wheeled chair were lowered into a boat. Tom Dennis and Florence followed, together with Captain Pontifex, who had proffered his services in securing a place of abode for Florence and her father. Once upon the dock, Dennis took charge of the chair, and all three started up-town, Pontifex carrying Dennis' big suitcase.

"Feels good to have the solid earth under-foot again," said Dennis. "How long do you expect to lay up here, Skipper?"

"We'll go out with the tide to-night," returned Pontifex. "I expect to pick up a cook here, who was to reach Unalaska by one of the island steamers, and I want to get our mail and papers. If we can get Mrs. Dennis comfortably berthed this afternoon, there'll be nothing to detain us, beyond standing off her trunk."

"Besides," he added in a lowered voice, "I'm anxious not to let the news slip out of what we're after. Before we could get

clear of the island we'd have schooners dogging us. In case Mrs. Dennis would like any ready money——"

"Thank you, Captain, I need nothing," said Florence quietly.

Little Jerry had not been allowed to come ashore, much to the disappointment of Florence, who had been bent upon rescuing the lad. Dennis, however, had already formulated a plan of action, largely because he considered that the boy's testimony would be of tremendous weight in backing up Florence when she interviewed the authorities.

An hour later, with the afternoon half gone, Florence and Captain Hathaway were snugly ensconced as paying guests in a cottage not far behind the ancient Greek church. Captain Pontifex had departed on his own business.

"Dear, are you *sure*?" In the security of her hired room, with the immobile Miles Hathaway watching them from his chair, Florence sought the gaze of Tom Dennis. To him it

seemed that her eye held a glowing probe of fire, searching his very soul.

"Remember, Tom dear, that I mustn't lose you. You're my one sure strong anchor in the world; your love and you are necessary to me," she said steadily. "So are you sure? Are you sure that the best plan would not be to stop here ashore and have Pontifex placed under restraint—here and now?"

"Are you sure that we had not best let the thought of money and salvage go for the present, placing our own lives and safety first of all? Are you sure you can come back to me, my dear?"

Despite the brave soul of her, at those last words her voice faltered.

"Dear wife, I am sure," said Dennis simply. "I shall play the game safely, letting them suspect nothing of what I know, and before any crisis occurs you will have acted. Two weeks—remember!"

"And you think Pontifex will suspect nothing if Jerry disappears to-night?"

"He would not consent to leave you and your father here together, knowing that you can communicate, if he suspected anything. He will think that Jerry has run away, and will doubtless figure on picking up the boy when he returns—he'll be too anxious to reach the *John Simpson* to bother about suspicions. It has not occurred to him that you would ask your father any questions out of the ordinary, and certainly your father cannot tell anything of what has happened unless asked. You have the phonograph and records in that valise, so go ahead and don't worry about me, dear. I'll play my part."

"Agreed, dear." She leaned forward and held up her face to his. "Then let's leave father here, and go out to see the town; we'll spend our last hours together, before you go, and you can arrange about poor little Jerry."

An hour afterward, a grizzled old fisherman was listening to Tom Dennis and shaking

his head in stubborn negation.

"Not me, sir!" he affirmed with emphasis. "I dassn't run around the harbour without no light——"

"But your lantern might go out for five minutes!"

"Not mine, sir. Besides, helpin' a feller escape from a whaler ain't no jokin' matter! Fact it ain't. I'd like to earn the money all right, but I dassn't buck up ag'in the law."

Florence gave her husband a meaning glance.

"Tom, please let me speak to him in private a moment!"

Shrugging his shoulders, Dennis walked away. As he strode up and down, he saw that Florence was speaking very earnestly, and that the grizzled fisherman seemed very uneasy. But presently the fisherman grinned and nodded, shaking hands with Florence. He had agreed.

"What on earth did you say to him?"



demanded Dennis, as they were walking away.

"Oh, I made it clear that he'd be doing a good deed—that's all." A ripple of laughter danced like sunlight across her face. "Why, from what you said, the poor man thought he would be compounding a felony!"

Dennis chuckled. "I guess a man would be willing to compound anything, if you'd smile at him and beg him to do it! Well, you're right about the good-deed part of it, and I'm glad it's settled. Let's look up some supper ashore; then I'll go aboard ship."

The skipper had promised to send a boat ashore for Dennis; so, when darkness was beginning to fall, he hailed the brigantine from the dock, Florence at his side. Five minutes later a whaleboat was pulling in, with Ericksen in the stern.

"Good-bye, my dear, and God bring you back safely," said Florence softly, as she kissed him good-bye.

Dennis answered with a reassuring smile.

"You've got my little flash-light, haven't you?"

"Everything as planned, my heart. Good-bye!"

Dennis climbed down into the boat which swept around and headed back to the brig. Florence stood on the dock, watching. She exchanged a final wave of the hand before the boat swept out of sight under the counter of the *Pelican*; then she turned and slowly walked in to the shore.

There, however, she remained, in the shadow of the long warehouses already piled high with bone from other whaling ships. Darkness closed down upon the bay, and the lights of the little town began to glimmer and gleam under the hills. Out on the water the lamps of the *Pelican* showed red and white in the gloom.

Had the cook, Frenchy, come aboard? Florence did not know. She knew that Tom Dennis was there, among men who indubitably meant him no good; whether

his would-be assassin had reached Unalaska in time to join the ship, she knew not. She waited, shivering a little, until by degrees the red side-light vanished. Presently the lights showed green and white—and she knew that the tide was on the ebb, that the ship had swung about to her cable. There was a light breeze, but strong enough to carry the brig to sea.

Suddenly a flare lighted up the forward deck of the whaler. The voice of Bo'sun Joe drifted over the water with strange sweetness, joined by the voices of other men and interjected by the guttural utterances of Kanakas trying to keep tune; while the clicking pawls and the slowly shifting lights betrayed that the anchor was coming up:

"We cracked it on, on a big skiute,  
    *To me hoodah, to me hoodah!*  
We cracked it on, on a big skiute,  
    *Hurrah for the Black Ball line!*  
Blow, my bullies, blow,  
For California oh!  
There's plenty of gold  
As I've been told,  
On the banks of the Sacramento-o!"

Meantime, the capstan chantey was being drowned by other voices—the steely ring of Pontifex, the roar of Manuel Mendez, the shriller tones of Corny and others as orders were repeated and the topsails were set. The confusion of voices became more pronounced.

"Hurry up with that royal!" came the voice of Pontifex. "Leggo that lee-brace and trim—hurry up!"

"Aye, sir!"

"Head-sails and spanker ready sir," came the voice of Leman. "Anchor a-trip!"

Then a confused medley of orders:

"Brace round them head-yards! . . .  
Cat your hook and shake out those courses!  
. . . Aft with that sheet, now. Shake  
a leg! . . . Bo'sun, haul out that bow-  
line!"

"Aye, sir! Haul out the bowline!"

Haul upon the bowline, Kitty lives at Liverpool;

*Haul on the bowline, the bowline haul!*

Haul upon the bowline, Kitty lives at Liverpool,

*Haul on the bowline, the bowline haul!*

Breathless, Florence watched and listened. Would Tom succeed without trouble? Would the plan, dangerous at best, succeed in getting little Jerry safe ashore? The ship's lights were slowly moving now, moving toward the entrance of that winding, precipitous passage. Captain Pontifex was in charge himself, for the passage demanded sharp tacking and skilful handling; his steely voice carried back across the light wind, across the silence of the northern night. Florence strained her eyes into the darkness. The time was at hand, now.

"Ready about! Down your helm, there! Hard-a-lee!" Florence could picture the big spanker-boom hauled in, the head-sheets slackening off; the lights showed that the brig was coming up into the wind. "Tacks and sheets! Maintops'l haul! Round with them after-yards, there! Fore-bowline, let go an' haul!"

Not ten minutes were consumed in the manoeuvre, for the *Pelican* was smartly



handled. To the watching Florence, however, that ten minutes seemed an eternity. The voices lessened in the distance; the whaler's lights became tiny glimmering points as she slowly slid away and was gone.

Suddenly, down on the surface of the water, appeared a tiny pin-point—a flash of light that was gone instantly. It flashed again, and again vanished. From the watching girl came a deep breath—a sigh of almost angonized relief, as the tension which was holding her was swiftly relaxed.

After this, nothing. The *Pelican* was gone in the winding channel, although snatches of song drifted back as Bo'sun Joe led the chanteys that fetched her about on new tacks. Over the water lay darkness and silence; from somewhere back in the town a tiny phonograph lifted a tinkling piece of band music into the night.

Florence walked out upon the dock, still

trembling beneath the nervous strain of those moments. Five minutes passed—five intolerable dragging minutes. Then from the water she caught the drip and splash of muffled oars, and she called out softly.

"All right, ma'am!" came the hoarse response. A dim shadow loomed up, and the voice of the grizzled fisherman continued: "Thought better not to show no light at all, ma'am. Ain't so likely to get questions asked——"

"You got him?"

"Aye. Can you give him a hand, ma'am? The lad's mortal cold——"

Florence leaned down and gripped an icy hand.

"Golly, I sure thought my legs was froze!" came the chattering voice of Jerry. With all her surprising strength, the girl heaved; and he came up beside her. "Scared stiff, I was!"

"They've gone." Florence turned and

took the horny hand of the fisherman. "Thank you," she said simply. "I think Mr. Dennis wanted me to give you this——"

"Sho', ma'am, I don't want no money for that!" protested the other. But Florence forced the money upon him, and, with a last handshake, urged Jerry away toward warmth and dry clothes.

By this time the boy's teeth were chattering so that talk was impossible. Upon reaching her own cottage, where Florence had already engaged a room for Jerry, she gave him a spare suit of old clothes which Dennis had left for him, and left him to change.

"Be quick!" she exclaimed, as she departed. "I want to know all about it!"

"Y-y-yes, ma'am," chattered Jerry.

Ten minutes later, partially warmed and clad in dry clothes, Jerry, moon-faced and sheepish, stumbled into the room where Florence sat beside her immobile father. The eyes of Captain Miles Hathaway dwelt upon Jerry

"Come here by the fire." Florence set him in a chair beside the oil-stove that warmed the room. "Now, tell me! Did everything go all right?"

"Yes'm, I guess so." Jerry grinned. "That is, far's I know it did, for *me*. You see, Mr. Dennis, he told me what to do. So just 'fore they called all hands, I messed things up in the galley consid'able, and the new cook——"

"The new cook came, then?" interjected Florence, a little pale.

"Yes'm. Frenchy, they called him. So him and the steward tailed on the lines, with the rest, and the Missus, she was mad as an ol' cat about the galley bein' messed up, and so she come to 'tend to it, and I slipped down into the cabins and met Mr. Dennis. He had the stern window open, and he give me that electric lamp and a life-buoy what he'd snaked down from the stern-rail after dark.

"So I got the life-belt 'round me an'

clumb out the window and hung on the line that Mr. Dennis had made fast, and waited till he give me the word. Golly, I was scared! The skipper, he was right up there over my head, and he was talkin' with Frenchy, and he says: 'There's no call for you to get mad, Dumont. You get rid of her husband first like you'd ought to of done back in Chicago.' And Frenchy, he says, 'Where is he?' The skipper, he says, 'Down below I guess, but don't do nothin' now because I figger on sending him down in a divin'-suit when we get started to work.' Then they both laughed, and just then Mr. Dennis, he give me the word to swing off——"

"Had he heard them talking?" demanded Florence, white-lipped.

"Naw. He didn't know they was talking up there at all; he'd been standin' back from the window a piece, I guess. I was scared they'd hear him give me the word, but they didn't. So I slid down into the



water and the ol' ship walked right away and nobody seen me. Tell you what, it was cold! I flashed the light a couple o' times, then the old guy give me a hail and come alongside and took me in. Golly, but I was glad!"

Florence sat motionless, a deathly pallor upon her face. In the boy's report she glimpsed utter and horrible destruction of all the plans which she and Tom Dennis had built up. The whole ghastly truth had flashed upon her, through the words of Pontifex which Jerry had overheard—and which Dennis had not overheard.

They would send Tom down in a diving-suit; and no one could tell what had happened under the sea in the green depths! Florence knew that she would not dare to put through her share of the scheme, after this. She might succeed, but only after Tom Dennis had perished.

"Go along to bed, Jerry," she muttered, her lips white. The boy looked at her,

and with fear upon his face, rose. He stumbled away and was gone.

Florence met the motionless dead gaze of her father.

"You know what it means, father?" she said, her voice lifeless. "It means that they'll murder him! If I stop here, he'll be lost! We can't get the revenue cutter here before another week, because the wireless station is closed down—the operator's sick. We found that out this afternoon. And, father, Tom matters more to me than—than anything else!"

The eyes of her father slowly moved. "Yes!"

"No time for the phonograph now; I'll have to give up our whole scheme of action." Florence drew a deep breath. "I'll have to warn Tom, father; the only way to warn him will be to follow the *Pelican* and—and do it openly. I know where the wreck lies.

"That fisherman who brought in Jerry—

I know where he lives. His boat has a motor, and he says he often cruises among the islands. I think he'll take me. Anyway, there's no larger boat here than his. I must see him to-night, at once, and arrange to get off in the morning. I'll see the authorities, explain about the phonograph, and you can tell them all about it while I'm gone. Perhaps they can get help to us. If that fisherman will take me, maybe we can get Tom away before——"

She broke into low sobs. She could see only diaster ahead—and duty to the man whom she loved. Suddenly she leaned forward, caught her father's lifeless hand.

"Father! You know all about this place, and everything! Tell me! Is there anything else I can do? If there is, I'll get out the phonograph now. Is there?"

Slowly the lids of Miles Hathaway moved twice. "No."

"And you think I'm right to go? It's the only thing to do? We'll lose everything,

for Pontifex will loot the wreck and be gone before we could get back here and have the cutter after him. But isn't it the only thing to do?"

"Yes," said the eyes of Miles Hathaway.

## CHAPTER X

### THE WRECK

From Unalaska to the position indicated upon the chart as the resting-place of the *John Simpson* was, in the rough, six hundred knots—nearly seven hundred miles.

When Tom Dennis awakened, the morning after the *Pelican* tacked out of the Unalaska channel, he found that she had, with the audacity of all whaling ships, run through Unimak Pass in the dark and was now tearing across the North Pacific at an eight-knot clip, with a stiff south-easter rolling her along bravely.

Dennis realized full well that he must avoid all appearance of suspicions having been awakened in him. When at breakfast Mrs. Pontifex remarked upon the blessed relief of having the cook aboard, Dennis



quite ignored the subject therefore, conscious that Ericksen was watching him with keen and predatory gaze.

"And when shall we make that position, Skipper?" he asked.

Pontifex shrugged. "If this breeze holds, it's a three-day run for us. Baring a dead calm, we'll be on the spot—let's see, this is Saturday; we'll be on the spot Tuesday morning without fail. Eh, Mr. Leman?"

"Easy, sir. Had we better overhaul that diving-tackle, sir?"

"Yes. Break it out to-day. Bo'sun Joe, rig up a derrick for'ard to-day; chances are we'll be able to lay close enough to the wreck to swing the stuff directly aboard, and we'll not want to waste time. A south-easter might lay us up on those islands. Ever been diving, Mr. Dennis?"

Dennis nodded. "Twice. Never at sea, out in Lake Michigan."

"Then we'll have a new sensation for you, if you like." Pontifex smiled cruelly.

"Bo'sun Joe and I are the only ones aboard with any experience, and if you care to take a shift with us, we'll be glad."

"I'm in for anything that'll make me useful," said Dennis. "You think the wreck is still on the rocks where we can reach it, then?"

"We're gambling on it," returned Pontifex curtly.

The wind held, and the old whaler blew down the miles of westering with every stitch of canvas taut as a drumhead. That afternoon Tom Dennis got a good straight look at the new cook—a most disreputable little man, dirty and slouchy in the extreme. Gone were the trim mustachois, gone was all the natty air; but the man was the same who had spilled a vial of chloroform in the Chicago room of Tom Dennis. There was no doubt about it.

Dennis, however, said nothing; later, when Corny introduced the cook as Frenchy, he shook hands and was very pleasant, and

if Dumont suspected anything, his suspicions were set at rest by Dennis' air of careless non-interest.

Upon the following day the brigantine was still tearing along with a swirl of water hissing under her counter. Off to the north the islands showed their mountain-tips against the sky, blue and continuous as some distant mainland. Talking with the mates and boat-steerers and Kanakas, Tom Dennis was entertained with many stories of those islands: how fox- and seal-farmers were scattered through the group; how small launches cruised the entire length of the island chain with impunity; how in time to come there would be a thriving island population where now were empty stretches of land or scattered communities of miserable natives.

And there were other and more ominous tales: tales of Boguslav and Katmai, of islands that came and went overnight, of oil-soaked whalers caught under descending showers of hot ash and burned to the water's

edge. There were tales of seal-poaching, of poachers who fought each other, of Yankees who fought Japs; and these tales verged upon the personal. Nods and winks were interchanged when Bo'sun Joe told about "men he had known", or when black Manuel Mendez related exploits of which "he had heard". Tom Dennis gained some fine material for feature-stories—but it worried him. He began to realize that these men among whom he had fallen were, so far as their natures were concerned, no better than pirates.

Then, upon the evening of the second day, came the affair which proved that all restraint was now loosed.

Darkness was falling, and having no particular longing for the society of the Missus and Pontifex, in the stern cabin, Dennis was in the waist near the try-works, listening while Corny spun a whaling yarn to the watch. The yarn was broken into by a sudden

choking cry, followed by an excited call in Portuguese. The voice was that of Manuel Mendez who would take the deck from Mr. Leman in a few moments.

At sound of the cry, Corny whipped out his knife and was gone like a shadow. Dennis was the first to follow, darting after the black boat-steerer toward the windward side of the deck, whence the voice had come.

An instant later, Dennis had turned the corner of the try-works. What had happened he could not tell; but he saw the huge figure of Manuel Mendez hanging to the mizzen-shrouds, groaning faintly. Close by, the insignificant little cook was facing the glittering knife of Corny—facing it with bare hands.

Corny, growling savage Cape Verde oaths, leaped. Swift as light was Frenchy, darting in and out again, sweeping the knife aside, striking catlike. Corny staggered back.

At that instant Mr. Leman swept upon the scene, his grey wisps of hair flying,



his long arms flailing. Frenchy, not hearing him, was knocked headlong into the galley and fell with a tremendous crashing of pots and pans.

"He keel Manuel!" cried out Corny, retreating from the second mate and putting up his knife. "He mos' get my eyes—ah, de poor Manuel!"

The giant figure of the bearded black fell limply. Dennis retreated, feeling sick; for Manuel Mendez had been stabbed with his own knife—after his eyes had been gouged away. Even for sea-fighting, there was something horrible about it.

Later, Dennis came upon the steward and two of the miserable white sailors talking near the fore-castle scuttle. The steward was describing what had happened.

"Joked 'im, the mate did; chaffed 'im abaht some woman. Bli' me! Frenchy was hup and at 'im like this." And the Cockney held the two first fingers of his right hand forked and aloft. "Tried to jerk

at 'is knife, 'e did, but Frenchy hup an' took if first—ugh! 'Orrible it was. And now the Capting, 'e'll 'ang Frenchy."

Somebody guffawed in the darkness.

"Hang Frenchy? Not him! Frenchy an' the Skipper have sailed together for years, they tell me. Hey, mates?"

"You bet," came a response. "Skipper don' dast hang *him*, I guess."

To Dennis it was rankly incredible; but it was true. In the morning Manuel Mendez, who would smile no more his white-toothed hungry smile, was sent overside with a chunk of coal sewed at his feet; and as the body was committed to the deep, Frenchy leaped to the rail and sent a bucket of slush over the canvas. An old whaling custom, this, to keep the dead man's ghost from following the ship. But Frenchy remained untouched for his crime. If there were any inquiry or punishment, Dennis never heard of it. The ship's routine pursued its usual course, Ericksen being advanced to the position of

second mate, Leman to that of first mate.

One man aboard, however, did not forget the happening; and this was Corny, the compatriot of the murdered mate. More than once, Dennis saw Corny's eyes follow Frenchy about the deck with a black, murderous look.

These things, however, swiftly were forgotten in the rumoured vicinity of the wreck; and since everyone aboard either knew, or had guessed, the import of this strange cruise, the ship hummed like a beehive with speculation and gossip. At noon, with the remarkable keenness which distinguishes whaling skippers, Captain Pontifex completed his observations and then laid out a new course, stating that it would bring them under the lee of the island at four bells in the morning watch, at which time the brigantine was to be hove to and await daylight.

Tom Dennis was the only one aboard, except Captain Pontifex and the Missus who did not sleep by watches. At dinner

that night the skipper broached a bottle of wine, and sent forward a tot of grog for all hands; suppressed excitement ruled the ship, even the gentle Kanakas breaking into wild native songs until suppressed by the Skipper's order. After an evening of much talk, mainly about the various methods of raising sunken treasure, Dennis turned in.

With the morning came disenchantment. Dennis had dreamed of gold-mad sailors, of wild haste, of everything forgotten save the proximity of sudden riches. But once on deck he found things very different. The *Pelican* was standing across the end of a barren rocky island; just beyond and ahead of her was a long scooped-out depression in the rocky shore, and in the centre of this depression lay the wreck of the *Simpson*. The seamen were attending strictly to their positions and duties; there was no hilarious ring of voices, and everything was about as romantic as a visit to a coaling-station.

But the *John Simpson* was there—no doubt about it!

Her stern, apparently wedged in among a nest of rocks, stood up at a sharp angle, the deck not quite awash but running down into the water swiftly. The aftermast stood a broken stump. At some distance showed the foremast, likewise broken. Dennis turned to Pontifex and the Missus who stood beside him.

"That foremast seems a long distance away," he said. "Doesn't look natural."

"Broke in two," vouchsafed the Missus curtly. Pontifex nodded.

"That's it," he stated with conviction. "Fore part lays in deep water—eight or ten fathom, probably. Look at her stern. See the water a-drip? She's well covered at high tide: just now the tide's out. No wonder she broke!"

"Looks as if we'd anchor right close to her fore-hatch," said the Missus.

Ericksen, with a whaleboat and hand-line,



was engaged in taking soundings of the position. Suddenly a savage exclamation escaped Pontifex who had been scrutinizing the visible stern of the wreck through a pair of binoculars

"Take charge, Mr. Leman," snapped the skipper, then lifted his voice. "Corny! Lower away—four hands will be enough to row us in. Come on, Mr. Dennis!"

As Corny's crew leaped to the falls of a forward boat, Pontifex strode forward, his thin face murderous. Dennis followed him in amazement.

"What's the trouble, Skipper?"

"Come on," responded Pontifex snarlingly. "I'm not sure yet—but if it's true——"

Seeing that the Skipper was in no mood for questions, Dennis said nothing further but followed into the whaleboat. Four Kanakas gave way at the long oars, and the boat began to slide landward. Pontifex studied the wreck through his binoculars a moment, then handed the glasses to Dennis.

"Look at it—on the mainmast!"

Puzzled, Dennis focused on the stump of the mainmast. High up, so high as to be well beyond reach, he discerned a small object; it looked like a bit of board nailed to the mast.

"Is that writing on it?" he exclaimed, lowering the glasses.

Pontifex nodded sourly. "Probably. We'll soon see."

Boatswain Joe's boat, which had finished its survey and was heading for the ship, passed within hail. Pontifex transmitted word to Mr. Leman by Ericksen, ordering the *Pelican* laid as close alongside the fore-hatch of the wreck as the depth would allow. Bo'sun Joe reported that the fore-part of the *Simpson* lay in nine fathoms, with fair holding-ground for the anchors, and that the whaler could crowd alongside her easily.

As their boat drew in, Tom Dennis could see that the stern of the wreck must indeed be completely submerged at low tide; this

was attested by the barnacles and weedy growths covering the rails and decking. But it was the square bit of plank nailed to the mast which drew his gaze and that of the Skipper.

"Ah!" cried Pontifex, with a furious oath. "Look at that, Dennis! A painted sign!"

Taking the glasses, Dennis could indeed make out that the board appeared to bear words or characters—and to his eye they were Japanese. At this query, the skipper swore again.

"Aye, the yellow scum! They swarm around the islands, raiding fox-farms and poaching or trading according as they dare. One of their boats happened along here, blast the luck, and saw the wreck; posted a sign to warn off their own countrymen, and went for help. They came at high water and didn't wait for ebb tide. Notice where that sign is, up there? Way enough, Corny; we don't want to board her."

The boat swung around on idle oars, twenty feet from the rocks that held the stern of the *Simpson*. Dennis scrutinized the board carefully, then handed the glasses to Pontifex.

"It's tough luck, Skipper," he said quietly. "To think that she lay here undiscovered for over two years, then was found only a week or so before we came!"

"A week?" Pontifex stared at him with flaming eyes. "How d'ye know that?"

"Focus up on those nail-heads in that board. They're rusty, of course, but the rust hasn't gone into the wood around them—see? And the black paint on the board looks pretty glossy when the sunlight catches it right."

"Right you are!" commented the Skipper with a growl.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it!" Pontifex looked venomous. "Fight, by the lord Harry! This is salvage. Whoever can hold hardest, gets. Let me get

the old brig anchored in here, and I'd like to see any dirty yellow poachers pry my fingers loose!"

Dennis remembered the big gun-rack in the cabin, and said no more. Rifles can be used for other purposes than killing seals and bears.

"We'll be all snug by breakfast-time," added Pontifex, watching the *Pelican* come slowly in as her top canvas fluttered down. "Then we'll set to work *pronto*. We don't want a gale to catch us here, either. More likely to catch fog, anyway."

And the skipper made good his words. Before seven bells were struck at 7.20 that morning\* the *Pelican* was berthed alongside the fore half of the *Simpson* and all was made snug below and aloft. Captain Pontifex called all hands and made an address.

"The Japs have been here, and they'll be back," he said curtly. "There's salvage money ahead of everybody, men, so we're going to pitch in and work day and night,

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\*Usually struck at this time so the relieving watch may breakfast first.



watch and watch. The day watches will devote themselves to getting the stuff aboard, because a diver can't remain down very long in this water: all hands will have a chance at going down. The night watches will stow the stuff below and make a clear deck before morning.

"While we're lying here, we'll redistribute the watches. Mr. Leman and Mr. Ericksen will take the port watch, I'll take the starboard watch with Mr. Dennis and Corny. One man from each watch will be set ashore—that high point of rock makes a better lookout perch than the crosstrees—to watch for the approach of any craft whatever. And mark this, men! If you don't report back to the beach when the watches are changed, I'll come ashore and hunt you down with a shotgun! That's all. The starboard watch will keep the deck."

Did the port watch go below? Not yet! Breakfast was a formality, a hurriedly bolted affair; ten minutes later one of the four white

seamen was set ashore as lookout, and the Skipper fell to work.

"You'll mind the pumps my watch, my dear," said Pontifex to the Missus. "When I'm down, I'll trust nobody else to watch my air supply. Do you want to go down, Mr. Dennis?"

"You bet," and Dennis laughed. "I'd like nothing better!"

A complete double set of diving apparatus was already awaiting them.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ENEMY COMES

The water was cold—cold and clear and biting as ice. To Dennis, inside the rubber suit, it seemed as though he had been plunged bodily into liquid ice. Through the thick glass of the helmet he could see the green translucence all around him, clear and empty and shimmering with the sunlight from above. For himself, as for the other green hands at the work, he knew that a long submersion would be impossible.

Darker grew the water underfoot as the light from above was diffused to the greater depths. Dennis had gone down from the quarter-deck of the *Pelican*; this, according to the soundings, would bring him to the sea-floor at the after end of the front half

of the wreck. He could thus see whether the contents of the *Simpson's* main-hold, aft of which she had broken in two, lay piled upon the sea-floor between the two sections of the wreck. If so, the work of salvage would be greatly hastened. Pontifex, in the meantime, was exploring the bows and fore hatch of the wreck.

Down went Tom Dennis into the depths, in a seemingly interminable descent. Suddenly a huge shadowy black mass seemed rushing at him from below, and swift terror sent his heart throbbing; for he felt very helpless. Then he remembered—the wreck, of course! The regular "click-click" of the pumps, sounding down through his air-valves, reassured and heartened him. An instant later he stood upon the bottom.

He wondered that there was very little growth or algae to obstruct him, until he realized that what little algae he could see were bending far over in the grip of a fairly strong sub-surface current, which,

combined with the intense coldness of the water, had a discouraging effect upon marine growths. The bottom was not smooth, however, being extremely rocky and uneven.

The *Simpson* had apparently broken just abaft the engine-room, and the fore half lay with her sloping deck toward the shore. Dennis had come to the bottom close to her keel, and he was no long time in discovering that spilled over the sea bottom lay almost enough cargo to fill up the *Pelican*.

Having brought a line ready prepared, Dennis got the bight around a packing-case plastered with barnacles. As he was drawing it taut, came a jerk upon his life-line—the signal that his agreed "stint" was up. Having no wish to be crippled or laid on the sick list, Dennis responded, and at once was hauled off the bottom.

His ascent was very slow, and of necessity; for a quick jerk up from the depths would ruin any man alive. The progression had to be gradual and halting.



On the way up, it occurred to him for the first time that he was literally in the hands of his enemies!

The moment he was in the morning sunlight again, Tom Dennis forgot his uneasiness and laughed at the terror which had seized upon him in the depths. It was absurd.

He did not go down again that morning, however.

Dennis was nearly clear of his diving-suit before the Skipper's copper helmet broke the water amidships. Pontifex reported that the bow plates of the wreck were torn out, and he had lined two cases; these were brought in, together with that which Dennis had secured, and were at once smashed open. The two cases from the fore hold proved to contain ammunition; that from the main hold, two excellently packed machine-guns.

This was enough for Pontifex, who at once conjectured that the main and after

holds of the *Simpson* had contained the bulk of the machine-guns, the most valuable part of her cargo. Corny at once broke out a kedge, lowered it to the stern of his boat and hung it there by a stop to the ring, then started off to the stern of the *Simpson*. Once laid among the rocks in the shallower water there, the crew tramped around the capstan while Bo's'n Joe lifted "Windy weather! Stormy weather!" into a resounding chorus.

At last it was done. The *Pelican*, all reconnaissance over, lay snugly ensconced between the two sections of the *John Simpson*. The off watch went below, curiosity appeased by the barnacled unromantic packing-cases; and Captain Pontifex fell to hard work, going down again almost at once.

Dennis took charge of the after pumps, while the Missus herself took the wheel of those in the waist. The Kanakas, only prevented from diving naked by the depth and the icy coldness of the water, were eager

to try the diving-suits. As each man went down in turn, he carried four lines, making them fast to as many cases. Thus, despite the brief diving spells, in no long time the cases began to come aboard as fast as they could be handled.

When the watch knocked off at eight bells, noon, Dennis was amazed by the number of cases which had come aboard. He was dead tired, also; the constant strain of watching the pump gauges and keeping the air at exactly the right pressure was no light one, and at odd moments he had tailed on to the lines with the other men.

"I see you're no greenhorn," commented Pontifex at dinner, with a sharp glance at the hands of Dennis. "Where'd you learn to keep your thumb clear while hauling a line?"

"Oh, I've knocked around ships a little," Dennis laughed. "Are you going to stay in this position?"

"Yes. If the Japs come, we're fixed to

keep 'em off both ends of the wreck. Well, think you can go down again this afternoon?"

Dennis nodded. "Sure! I'm supposed to have a bad heart, but I haven't noticed it."

As it chanced, however, he did not go down again that day, for during Mr. Leman's watch the after airhose developed a leak which had to be fixed, and the second apparatus was consequently out of business until the following morning. Pontifex, who took the first dog-watch, kept the one suit hard at work, and all aboard were well satisfied with results.

That night, by the light of a huge flare set atop the try-works, the cargo was stowed. Shears had to be run up over the hatchways to handle the heavy cases, and the deck was not washed down until just before the morning watch. When Dennis came on deck at 4 a.m. the ship was incased in

so heavy a fog that the lookout was withdrawn from the island.

"Dis fog, maybe she keep up a week," grumbled Corny, overhauling the diving lines. "If de Jap sheep come, den look out!"

The stern of the wreck, which had been hidden at high tide, was again being uncovered. So thick was the fog that Dennis doubted the possibility of diving, but his doubts were soon set at rest. Corny and the skipper, each carrying lines, made a descent, and Corny returned with word that it was a "cinch".

Pontifex was still down, and Dennis was preparing to get into the suit as Corny vacated it, when of a sudden the voice of the Missus bit out from the waist.

"Keep quiet, all hands! Listen!"

Astonished, Dennis obeyed. Corny, beside him, stood with hand cupped to ear, slowly shaking his head. Nothing was to be heard, The fog was impenetrable.



"What did she hear?" murmured Dennis. The Cape Verde man shook his head.

"No telling. But nobody don't fool *her*—ah! Listen, queek!"

Dennis heard it then—an indistinct and muffled vibration, too slight to be called a noise, which was felt rather than heard. It came again and again, an irregular sound.

"It's de sail," said Corny. "De sail flap-flap in de wind—and dere's somet'ing else goin', too——"

"A boat's engine!" exclaimed Dennis softly.

"Yeou, Corny!" The Missus gave swift command aft. "Call all hands aft an' tell Mr. Leman to fetch the rifles. Lively yeou!"

Meantime, she was bringing Pontifex aboard, manifestly against his will, as the signal-line testified. Dennis kicked out of the rubber suit, getting clear just as Bo's'n Joe came up the companionway. A moment later both Leman and Corny appeared,

each with an armload of rifles interspersed with shot-guns.

"Strike me blind!" exclaimed Ericksen, pausing beside Dennis, and listening intently. "If it ain't them Japs—a schooner, likely, beatin' up for the island under power, and all hands too lazy to take in sail! Aye, that's them."

"But it may be someone else," said Dennis. "A fisherman, perhaps."

Bo's'n Joe gave him a look of pitying scorn from his uptwisted eye. "You wait an' see!"

Rifles were served out to all aboard, Dennis among the rest, and by the time Captain Pontifex was up and out of his suit, the ship was ready for defence. Pontifex heard the news without comment; a rifle under his arm, he dispatched Corny to the crosstrees to keep watch from there, and ordered Mr. Leman to stand by with a megaphone.

"Growin' closer, sir," volunteered Ericksen. "Takin' soundings, she is."

The skipper nodded. The fog-muffled thrum of an engine was now distinctly perceptible, while the slatting of sails told that the approaching craft was not far off. The fog was thick and steady without a breath of wind to thin it out.

"All right, Mr. Leman," said Pontifex suddenly. "Let 'em have it."

Instantly the stentorian tones of Mr. Leman, intensified a thousandfold by the megaphone, blared out upon the fog.

"Stand off or ye'll run us down, ye lubbers! Keep away!"

From the mist came a shrill thin yell of surprise, followed by an excited jabbering of many tongues. Clearly the visitors were of foreign origin. Then a shrill voice lifted in English amid sudden silence as the thrumming motor ceased its noise.

"'Ello! Oo are you?"

"Very good, Bo's'n Joe," said the skipper

calmly. "She'll be in the centre of the fairway, most likely—about two points abaft our beam."

Ericksen lifted to his shoulder the shotgun with which he had armed himself, and two smashing reports blasted into the fog as he fired both barrels. A shrill clamour of voices made answer, followed by instantaneous and blanket-like silence. Then came a single sullen plunge, as of some heavy object striking the water.

"Ah!" remarked Pontifex, staring into the fog as though he could see through it. "Very good, Bo's'n—you reached 'em. They've anchored, and they'll lie doggo until the fog lifts. They know we'll waste no bullets if we can't see them."

"Reached them?" repeated Dennis. "You don't mean that Ericksen tried to hit them?"

Bo's'n Joe guffawed, and Pontifex gave Dennis a peculiar smiling look—a very diabolical look.

"My dear Mr. Dennis, that's exactly what he did. And some yellow beggar caught the pellets in his hide—in other words, got the hint! They'll try no games until they can see what they're up against."

"But where are they?" demanded Dennis, giving up any expostulation.

"About six fathoms away, I should say—not more than fifty feet, certainly." The skipper glanced at Mr. Leman, who nodded confirmation. "They might be less than that, and we couldn't see them, nor they us. After the fog lifts—well, then there'll be fun!"

"They'll fight?"

Pontifex caressed his moustache and smiled softly.

"More or less—they'll try some deviltry on us first. Lay out some harpoons and shoulder-guns, Mr. Leman; we'll have a few tonite bombs ready. Corny, bring in those cases that I lined before I came up. We'll get back to work directly."



Dennis saw no good in making protests. There was no law here save that of the strongest, and Pontifex was dead right in carrying the fight to the enemy, aggression being nine points of fighting law. Besides, Pontifex was manifestly enjoying the prospect, and just at present Dennis was playing a waiting game and had no desire to bring about any crisis.

There being no time for more workman-like methods, an anvil and a cold-chisel were brought aft, with half a dozen harpoons, and two of the hands were set to work cutting through the iron harpoon hafts, just behind the spear-points. Now, modern whaling is carried out almost exactly as the New Bedford whalers did it a century ago, except for a small brass cylinder fastened to the haft of the harpoon. In this cylinder is carried a tonite bomb. Whether the harpoon be flung by hand or be fired from a shoulder-gun, it carries the bomb into the whale—and that ends the whale.

The points off the six harpoons, Mr. Leman made ready a couple of shoulder-guns and loaded the cylinders of the harpoons with bombs. As he observed, they might or they might not do much damage, but they would make a big noise when they hit; and with this intent the weapons were laid aside to be used in case of any aggressiveness on the part of the enemy. For the present, at least, the Japs seemed to be maintaining a careful silence.

"Well, Mr. Dennis," said Pontifex at length, "I'm going to resume my interrupted job; I guess I can lay a few more lines before quitting. Who's going down on your lines?"

"Why, I will—if you think it's safe," returned Dennis. "You're not going to knock off work, then?"

"On account of that yellow scum? I should say not!" exclaimed Pontifex. "Mr. Leman will do any fighting that's necessary while I'm down; and the Missus will see

to it that nothing fouls our lines. But send someone else if you don't like the idea."

"Oh, it suits me," answered Dennis, knocking out his pipe. "I dare say there's no great risk, but it would feel sweet if the ship left us prowling on the bottom, eh?"

Pontifex grunted and went forward, being swallowed up in the fog that cloaked everything.

Having learned from Corny that the bottom was pretty dark, but by no means unsuited to working, Dennis called the steward. Although the little Cockney was a viperous criminal ashore, he was a faithful soul at sea, and Dennis had learned that he entertained a strong feeling of responsibility while watching the pumps.

"Hi, steward!" he called. "Come and give me a hand with this suit—and bring a couple of Kanakas to run these pumps, too. Corny's busy with the lines."

"Comin' sir," said the steward's voice, and the Cockney appeared a moment later.

Meantime, in the waist, Captain Pontifex was engaged in talk with the cook, while the Missus listened.

"Now's the time, Dumont," said Pontifex, fondling his curled mustache. "Work right along aft until you get on his line, savvy?"

"*Mais oui!*" returned Frenchy, his black eyes glittering. "But me, I like not this *diable* of a fog! It will be dark under the water."

"So much the better." And Pontifex smiled his cruel smile. "So much the better! He thinks I'm going down. Let the steward attend to his pumps—and we'll blame the steward for what happens. In this murky water he'll not see you coming down there—you can get on top of him and cut his lines and be off in a shot. Are you ready or not?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Frenchy, reaching for the diving-suit.

"And watch out for the tide," cautioned the skipper. "It's ebbing strong and you might lose your bearings if you don't look sharp."

Frenchy grinned, and unstrapped his sheath-knife.



## CHAPTER XII

### IN THE DEPTHS

As the steward helped pull up the rubber dress about the body of Dennis, he spoke in a low voice.

"Beg pardon, sir, but hit looks like you 'ad lost your knife."

Dennis glanced down at the deck where his paraphernalia lay. The belt and sheath were there; but the large knife, a regular part of every diver's equipment, was missing.

"That's queer!" he said slowly. "Hm! Probably Corny lost the knife and didn't notice it. Better get me one from the galley, steward: it'll take a carving knife to fit that big sheath."

"Yes, sir." The steward slipped off into the mist. The two Kanakas stood at the pump-wheels, shivering in the mist and talking together.

A moment later the steward reappeared, carrying a long, keenly edged carving knife. He tried it in the sheath, and it fitted well enough.

"Werry good, sir. All set!"

Dennis liked the little Cockney—he liked the man's thorough responsibility in his job of watching the pumps. But now, as he helped adjust the back and breast-pieces, and buckled the belt about his waist, he felt once more that in this work he was putting himself in the power of his enemies.

He forced a laugh at the idea; yet it took a supreme effort to conquer his imagination. They did not want to kill him, of course—but if they did, how easy in this fog! But that was all nonsense. There was no question of murdering. The very notion was folly!

Dennis helped the steward adjust the big copper helmet, and the Cockney screwed it fast into the neck-plate. A moment later, Dennis was climbing over the rail. The usual diver's shot-line would carry him straight

down, and besides this, a ladder had been slung over the stern to assist in the ascent. The steward gave him the four lines, attached to the rail at intervals which would prevent their fouling after being attached to the cases, and Dennis slipped down into the depths.

As always, the steady and regular clicking of the pumps sounded through his air valves with reassuring effect. Captain Pontifex had not provided very up-to-date outfits, with telephones and electric lights and other frills—for this reason no diving work could be done at night. The suits were good and dependable, however, lacking only gloves to make them well adapted to this icy water.

Dennis resolutely dismissed all thoughts of possible danger, and concentrated his attention upon the work in hand.

As Corny had reported, the water down below was clear enough for work, but the lack of filtering sunlight made it gloomy, grey, and obscure in details. When at last

Dennis felt his feet touch the bottom, he was forced to stand for a moment and adjust his eyesight to the altered conditions. Presently he was enabled to descry objects, and he moved toward the scattered and far-strewn heaps of boxes which lay between the two sections of the *John Simpson*.

Dennis could see nothing of Pontifex at work below, but in the present obscurity that was not strange. Besides, the divers, from waist and stern of the *Pelican*, kept as far apart as possible for fear of the lines fouling.

Now, as he advanced, Dennis thought that he perceived a dimly moving shape off to his left to seaward; but it vanished almost instantly. It might have been some fish, he concluded, or a bunch of drifting algae. It was now hard upon noon, and the tide was fast on the ebb.

With the strange buoyancy which comes to the diver on the bottom, Dennis took leaps, one after the other, with a boyish

delight. He cleared no ground this way, however, and soon returned to the slow progress afoot; there was too much danger of losing his balance and burying his helmet in the ooze as he came down.

Presently he came to an upright crowbar in a heap of boxes, which Corny had been using to pry loose each case in order to pass the bight of a line around it. Dennis found two loose boxes and made fast two of his lines; but without tying himself to the pile, he could not use the crowbar—his own buoyancy was too great. So, to save time, he passed on to some scattered cases ahead.

At this juncture, his remaining two lines fouled about his dragging air hose. When at length he got them extricated and clear, he had great difficulty in maintaining his balance against the set of the tide. But at length he got the first line fast to a box, and with the second line he secured another.



As he straightened up and grasped his safety-line to signal the steward that he was ready to ascend, he observed a great shadowy mass in the water ahead. Accustomed to the gloom by this time, he perceived that the mass was the after-end of the *John Simpson*, reaching up through the water on a sharp incline.

He tugged at his line. To his amazement he felt no resistance whatever. He tugged harder, more sharply—and the line coiled weakly toward him. At the same instant he heard a sharp click behind his ear; the safety valve in his helmet had snapped shut. His air-tight hose and his line had been started!

In this supreme moment, when he faced inescapable death, Tom Dennis felt none of his previous fear. His brain worked like a clock.

He knew that either from the stern above, or from the water beneath he had been cut off and left to die. He had been too slow—

he had failed to heed his inward premonitions. And the sheer horror of it was that he would not die for a comparatively long time. There was sufficient air in his helmet and in the bellying folds of his rubber suit to sustain life for several minutes!

What good would this do him? None. What good would it do him to reach the line he had made fast to boxes? None. This was no accident. The ends of his lines told him that they had been cut clean, severed. Those above would disregard any possible signals, would let him perish miserably. He could depend upon no one. He was trapped, helpless, murdered!

Then suddenly, Dennis perceived something in the water behind him. He turned.

Not a dozen feet distant, another diver stood there, helmet turned toward him, watching. Through the thick glass Dennis glimpsed keen dark eyes, a gleam of white teeth; this was not Pontifex at all. Recogn-

tion came to him, and a thin cry escaped his lips—Dumont! Here was the murderer!

Dennis gripped his knife, half-minded to retaliate upon this assassin who had cut his lines; for in the man's hand he dimly caught the glitter of steel. But, as Dennis sensed himself for the leap, he checked the movement—another dim figure had appeared!

Amazement held Dennis spellbound, incredulous. There had been but two diving-suits aboard the *Pelican*; of this he was quite certain. Yet here upon the sea floor stood three divers!

Dumont—for the second figure was manifestly that of the cook—stood staring at Dennis as though inviting any hostile movement. But the third figure suddenly rose in the water with a great leap—rose and threw himself forward, and went caroming down upon Frenchy. Then the answer came to Dennis—a diver from the Jap boat! Under shelter

of the fog, knowing themselves unseen, the little brown men had gone to work!

And as he realized this, Dennis saw the figures of the two other divers, plunging together upon the bottom, abruptly obscured from his sight by a red mist uprising through the water. With horrified comprehension, Dennis realized that the murderer, Dumont, had been taken unawares, had been caught in his own trap—had cut the lines of one man only to have an unseen enemy spring upon him and stab him to death!

Dennis turned, and with a wild leap left the red-smeared scene behind.

The whole affair, from the moment he had heard his helmet valve click, had not taken twenty seconds. Already there had sprung into Dennis's brain the comprehension that he had but one bare slim hope of salvation—almost subconsciously he was aware of it, and almost upon intuition he leaped upward through the water. He leaped

not toward the *Pelican*, where he knew well that no help awaited him, but away from her; he leaped toward the shattered and sundered afterpart of the *John Simpson*.

Speed now meant life. He could not reach the shore in time, already—was it fact or imagination?—he fancied that his breathing was getting more difficult, the air in his lungs hot and vitiated. There came to him the horrible thought of a diver leaping about the bottom of the sea, leaping in huge bounds of twenty feet upward, leaping like a mad crazed animal until the air in his suit gave out and he dropped head-foremost in the ooze. It was a frantic thought. Upon the heels of it something tugged at the trailing lifeline and jerked Dennis down head first.

Knife in hand, he recovered his balance, thinking that the Jap diver had pursued him. But the trailing end of his line had caught in some obstruction—nothing more. With a sobbing breath of relief, Dennis slashed



away the line and bore onward with a high leap.

That bound gained the crushed decking of the *John Simpson*. The afterpart of the wreck lay upon a sharply inclined plane, its broken forward end upon the bottom, the stern high in its nest of rocks. Up that sharp steep slope crawled Tom Dennis.

To maintain his balance and to keep any foothold upon the slimy decking was difficult. He clung to the rail with his left hand, slowly working himself upward. He dared try no leaping here, lest like a rubber ball he fly over the rail with the seaward current and drop; and if a diver drops thirty feet he is apt to be crushed all at once into his helmet by the pressure—and it would not be nice.

"Can't take chances!" thought Dennis, then laughed inwardly at the notion. Take chances! Why, he was basing his entire hope of salvation upon chances of which he was totally uncertain! It had swiftly come to him that by gaining the after end

of the wreck, by crawling up her sloping deck to the stern, he would be out of the water. But would he? How far had the tide ebbed? He did not know. He could not remember what time the tide had turned—whether the wreck would be now uncovered or not.

Then there was the fog; another chance. If the fog had only slightly lessened, so those aboard the *Pelican* could see stern of the wreck, they would finish their work with rifles should Dennis emerge. Thus there was a double chance against him. Should he find himself out of water at the stern of the wreck, his only hope then would be that the fog still held thick as ever.

His ears were roaring now, and paining with an ache that thrummed at each pulse-beat. The air was steadily growing worse; Dennis paused to press more air up from his billowing suit, and gained momentary relief.

It occurred to him that he still had one friend aboard the *Pelican*—the steward. His knife had been removed purposely; the steward had noticed its absence; therefore, the little Cockney was not in on the murder-scheme. Dennis laughed slightly and turned again to his task of climbing.

Dragging himself up that slimy steep decking was hard work, and he cursed the tremendous weights that held him down; the buoyancy seemed gone out of him with his weariness. Then, suddenly, he came to a dead halt, straining his eyes to look upward and ahead, and keen despair went through him like a knife.

He had gained the after hatchway which was uncovered and yawned in a black hole to his right. Directly in front of him was the overhang of the poop—an eight-foot wall which, owing to the position of the wreck, deserved its name so far as Dennis was concerned. It overhung him; in order to go up the ladder in front of him, Dennis would

have to do it hand over hand, or not at all!

For a moment he paused. Pains had seized and were racking him. His throat and lungs felt afire. He knew that he could not last much longer, and with a frightful effort he flung himself forward; the knife, his sole means of escape from the diving-suit, he thrust down into the sheath of his belt, trusting that it would remain there.

Gripping the stairs of the ladder, Dennis hauled himself up. He dared spare nothing of energy or effort now; he was staking all upon one effort. If he failed to reach the poop he was gone.

Strangling, gasping spasmodically for the air that burned out his lungs, he came at last to the end of the ladder. He got his head about it; he could see the poop-deck there before him, and he writhed desperately over the edge of the ladder. With all his lightness in the water, he nearly failed at that moment. For one sickening instant he felt himself going backward and down—

then, heaving upward convulsively, he somehow made it safely. For a moment he lay weak and helpless.

A spasm of strangulation forced him on. He groped behind him for his knife, found it, and pressed forward. The water was lighter now—he was near the top. How near? Unless the stern were clear of the water, he would be lost. There was blood in his throat; his nose and ears were bleeding. To his terror, he lost his balance and plunged against the rail, nearly going over. He gripped the rail and hauled himself onward.

A frightful madness seized him, a convulsive gasping for relief, and he was near to ripping asunder his diving-suit. His frantic efforts had exhausted what little oxygen remained; he could press up no more good air from his suit. Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, he found that some horrible, deadly, agonizing weight was pressing him down. He could see only the grey dimness around him; red



specks were dancing before his eyes; that awful weight was oppressing him, and what caused it, he did not know, unless it were death. He came up against the rounded bulge of the stern-rail. It was the end. He could go no farther.

"That ends it!" he thought despairingly. "The tide hasn't ebbed enough."

He fell forward, unable to lift the weight of that copper helmet, for the oppression was crushing him down. He could not make out what that frightful weight could be, nor did he care. He reached up with his knife, as he lay there, and determined to end things swiftly. He refused to be longer tortured.

With a swift, reckless motion he ripped asunder the breast of his diving-suit.

To his amazement, nothing happened. No water entered. Instead, came a breath of cold sweet air that literally brought life into his lungs!

Two minutes later he was sitting up, sobbing the good clean air into his body!

He saw then what had happened—what that awful weight had been! It had been only the weight of his own body and equipment. Unknown to himself, he had emerged from the water into the dense thickness of the fog.

He had won clear!

## CHAPTER XIII

### PONTIFEX PLANS REVENGE

"Strike me blind," observed Bo's'n Joe gloomily, "if they ain't gone an' got poor Frenchy!"

No one else spoke for a bit. Mr. Leman spat over the rail and stared at the fog in the direction of the unseen Japanese ship. The Missus had gone to her cabin when the body was hauled aboard. Captain Pontifex stood looking down at the form, still incased in its diving-suit; and his pallid cavernous features were venomous with rage.

"I'd sooner have lost anyone aboard rather than Dumont—except the Missus," he said softly. "And to think they must have got him just after he got Dennis."

"Aye," said Bo's'n Joe.

It was very evident how Frenchy had come

by his fate. Transfixing his body, fastened so firmly within him that no easy pull would remove it, was a long-bladed knife with shark-skin handle—palpably a Japanese knife.

"Well," the Skipper turned away, "see that he's sewed up proper, Mr. Leman, and we'll bury him shipshape. Attend to repairing that dress, too."

When the skipper had disappeared aft, Bo's'n Joe looked at Mr. Leman.

"What's the Skipper got on his mind? He ain't goin' to stand by and see Frenchy killed without doin' anything?"

Mr. Leman reflectively tugged his whiskers, and squinted down his broken nose.

"Not him, Bo's'n—not him! 'Ready to work to-morrow', says he. Just wait till to-night, Bo's'n! If something don't happen to them Japs, I miss my guess. Leave it to him and the Missus! If this blasted fog don't break, he'll show 'em a thing or two."

The *Pelican* swung idly to her anchors all that afternoon.

It was easy for those aboard her to deduce exactly how Dumont had come to his end. The knife told the whole story. The flurry at the end of the lines, Dumont's frantic signal to be hoisted, all explained perfectly that he had encountered a diver from the enemy ship. The Japs had diving apparatus, of course.

Sullen resentment and fury filled the *Pelican*, from skipper to meekest Kanaka. All aboard had been wildly excited over salvage and treasure; because of this fact, Pontifex had a solidly united crew behind him in whatever he might attempt. Frenchy had not been particularly loved, but his murder showed that the enemy meant business—and in defence of their treasure-trove the crew of the *Pelican* were only too anxious to fight.

As the afternoon wore on, the fog thickened rather than lessened. At the end of the first



dog-watch all hands were called and Frenchy was committed to the deep, with the usual bucket of slush.

Someone observed that there was no chance of laying the ghost of Dennis in this customary fashion; within five minutes the remark had gone through the brig. No one cared particularly how Dennis had perished, but everyone was superstitious in the extreme. Mr. Leman allowed an anxious frown to disturb his flat countenance, and even the skipper, upon hearing the rumour, appeared disturbed.

"Not that I give two hoots for any ghost," he confided to the Missus, "but it makes a bad spirit aboard ship. Nonsense! A ghost doesn't come back, anyway."

"I've heard 'baout that happening," said the Missus gloomily but firmly. "And what folks believe in is apt to come true. You mark my words!"

"Then" and the skipper brightened—"they say that a death aboard ship always brings

wind—so we'd better get busy with those Japs before the fog lifts!"

This latter superstition was equally well known aboard, and predictions were that before morning the fog would be gone. Within another hour, however, everybody aboard was too busy to bother further with superstitions.

When darkness began to fall, with no sign of activity from Captain Pontifex, open grumbling began to spread along the deck. It was silenced by the Skipper in person, who appeared and ordered two of the whale-boats lowered.

"Mr. Leman," he commanded quietly, the entire crew listening tensely, "you'll take command of one boat. Lay aboard her six of those oil-bags from the store-room. Muffle the oars. Take a compass and mind your bearings. Two of you men lay aft, here."

Two of the white hands hastened aft and followed the Skipper down the companionway.

In five minutes they reappeared, struggling beneath the weight of the pride of the whaling fleet—the green-striped tea-jar. It was minus the big scarlet geranium plant, and should have been light; but it seemed most unaccountably heavy.

"Easy, there!" snapped the Skipper. "Corny, reeve a rope through that block at the mains'l yard and sling the jar into the boat—not Mr. Leman's boat, but mine. Bo's'n, lay down there and place her in the bow."

Ericksen seemed not to relish his task in the least, but he obeyed. In ten minutes the jar was safely stowed in the other whale-boat; from this boat all whaling gear was now removed, six oars alone being left.

"In with you, Corny," commanded the Skipper. "You and Ericksen with four Kanakas will row me out. Mr. Leman, precede us very slowly; when you sight that Jap, lay that oil on the water and then stand back to pick us up."

He turned to salute the Missus with a chaste kiss upon the cheek.

"Good-bye, my dear! You insist upon taking the third boat?"

"I reckon I can do as well as yeou," returned the Missus impassively. Good luck!"

"Same to you," answered the Skipper.

Six men were at the oars in Mr. Leman's boat, four more in that of the skipper. Mrs. Pontifex ordered the forward boat down, and the five remaining men into her. To them she handed rifles, then turned to the trembling steward.

"I'm leavin' yeou to tend ship," she stated firmly. "There's a shot-gun beside the helm; if anybody else boards, yeou let fly! No telling but some o' those Japs might ha' worked araound by the shore—but we'll give 'em something else to think abaout."

With that, she descended into her boat, compass in hand, ordered her rowers to give way, and vanished into the darkness of the fog

—not following the Skipper, but departing at a tangent from his course.

The steward hastened to the quarter-deck, secured the shot-gun, and perched upon the rail.

The Cockney was by no means lacking in acuteness. He had been cleaning up a muss in the stern cabin for the last half-hour; he knew that this muss was the debris from several ammunition packets, broken from the packing-case of ammunition that had been hauled in upon the morning previous. He knew that the scarlet geranium had been transplanted into a keg. He knew that this keg had previously been full of gunpowder; he knew likewise that the skipper had laboriously fashioned a fuse—and that the tide was now going out.

So as he perched upon the starboard taffrail and scrutinized the blank fog, the steward had a fairly certain idea of what to expect.

"Gawd 'elp them yellor swine!" he ob-



served reflectively. "Skipper's going to lye out that oil; it'll drift around 'em wi' the tide. That's what 'e was w'iting for, the hold fox! When the oil 'as got hall haround that ship, skipper sends 'is boat at 'er. Ho! Then 'e gets off in Mr. Leman's boat, first lightin' the fuse. Then 'e lights the oil. Oil an' fuse—and then the jar o' powder—blime, but 'e's a fox, a ruddy fox! Ho! And then the Missus she takes a 'and—only I bet skipper 'e don't know as 'ow that fusee is dry! Thinks it's wet as when 'e made it, 'e does! Well, wait an' see——"

His reflections ended in a chuckle. The steward, having no personal anticipation of danger, cared not a snap what went on out in the mist; in fact, he looked forward to a very enjoyable time.

The tide had turned, right enough, and was strongly on the ebb. Rolling himself a cigarette, the steward stretched along the rail and waited comfortably; he could feel the ship lift and tug and vibrate as the pull

of the tide-current swung her on the taunt hawsers from stem and stern. The steward watched the dim banks of fog with lazy anticipation. He was in the position of a front-seat spectator, and was determined to have a good time.

Thus, being intent upon the fog, waiting for the first flare of yellow flame and the first wild yell of alarm, the steward relaxed all vigilance as regarded his own surroundings. He was no seaman, and when the *Pelican* gave a queer little sideways lurch, he merely shifted his position slightly and reflected that a wave must have struck her. Still there came no sound from the fog, no token of flaring oil or fighting men. The steward lighted his cigarette and reflected that emptying the oil bags seemed to take considerable time.

It was perhaps five minutes later that a queer sound came from forward—a sound not unlike the breaking of a lax violin string, but deeper. The steward did not hear it at all; but a seaman would have known that

somewhere a taut cable had parted. When the brigantine began to rock gently and evenly, the steward took for granted that there must be a ground-swell or something of that sort.

Behind the steward moved a queer grotesque figure—a figure that might have been some strange nightmare shape moving silently in the darkness; a figure with enormous and bulbous head which rocked upon its shoulders in monstrous and uncanny fashion. The figure came to a pause just behind the steward whose position was rendered quite certain by the cigarette spark.

"Put up your hands!" snapped a voice suddenly.

The steward tumbled backward off the rail and plumped down on the deck. A faint howl of terror escaped him as he stared up at the grotesque, horribly-shaped figure whose bulk was intensified by the fog. The figure stood over him, and a rifle poked him in the ribs.

"'Ave mercy!" howled the terrified

steward. "I'm a poor, innercent man——"

"Oh, it's *you*! Didn't know you, steward," said the voice of Dennis. "Where's everybody? Get up, old boy—I'll not hurt you!"

But, recognizing the voice of Dennis, the steward could only emit a horrified gasp.

"Don't 'a'nt me, sir!" he pleaded, folding his hands and getting to his knees in desperate fear. "I didn't 'ave nothink to do wif it, sir——"

"Good heavens, I'm no ghost!" Dennis laughed. "Where's the skipper?"

"Gone, sir," quavered the steward. "Heverybody's gone."

"Where?"

"To fight that 'ere Jap ship, sir."

"You're all alone on board?"

"Yes, sir."

Dennis broke into laughter, dropped his rifle and seized the hand of the steward, pulling him erect.

"Here, man, don't be afraid!" he exclaimed. "I'm solid flesh and blood. But you'll have to unscrew this helmet—the thing's killing me, and I can't get rid of it. I've cut off the rest of the suit—take hold, now!"

Dennis sat down on the deck. Trembling still, the steward unfastened the catches of the helmet and unscrewed the big tinned-copper globe.

"Oh, but that feels good!" sighed Dennis. "I could open the front sight, but I couldn't get the thing off. Now the corselet——"

A moment later Dennis stood erect, gingerly feeling his neck and shoulders. Suddenly he laughed again and seized the steward's hand.

"Shake, old man!" he exclaimed heartily. "So they're all off fighting the Japs, eh? Mrs. Pontifex too?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you didn't know that I'd cut the



old ship adrift—and that we're outward bound with the tide?"

The poor steward gave a violent start, and stared around; but the shroud of fog was too dense.

"Drifting, sir?" he uttered fearfully. "And what'll the skipper do?"

"I should worry!" Dennis chuckled. "See here, steward—I know you weren't in on the plan to murder me; your giving me the knife proved that. So we'll stick together, old man, and if we get out of this, I'll see that *you* come out on top.

"Well, after Dumont cut my lines, I got out on the stern of the wreck, above the water; with your knife I got rid of most of the diving suit, and managed to get ashore. Two boats filled with Japs came ashore about dark, not knowing I was there. They landed, probably meaning to attack the *Pelican* later. But I shoved out their boats, and came aboard ship in one of them—got their rifles too."

He laughed heartily. "See here, steward—the Japs are marooned on the island! Th Skipper is out attacking their schooner. Meantime, we're drifting out to sea, and—what's the answer?"

"Blime, sir!" The steward gaped at him. "It's mortal queer!"

"It will be—for somebody," said Dennis grimly. "Now get me something to eat."

"Yes, sir. This way, sir." The steward, still but half-conscious of what had taken place, turned toward the galley.

At that instant a fearful yell arose from somewhere in the mist; a yell that quavered up and died quickly.

The steward halted, gazing over the star-board counter; but the ship had swung and was going out with the tide. It was over the port bow that a wild flare of light glimmered. Dennis saw it and cried:

"The fools! They've set her afire!"

"No, sir, it's the oil!" Breathlessly the

steward explained the Skipper's plan of attack. Before he had finished, the flare of light widened into a broad stream, lighting all the fog redly. With it sounded renewed yells—shrill piercing yells.

Then, off to one side, broke forth a crackle of rifles. That was the boat of the *Missus*, cleverly pumping bullets at the Jap ship from a wide angle. Through this burst a volume of hoarse shouts, followed almost at once by a single terrific detonation—the thunderous shock of which sent the *Pelican* reeling and shuddering. The green-striped jar had exploded.

After that one bursting, rending, shattering crash, a swift darkness ensued. Through this blackness pierced fragmentary glimmers as the scattered and far-flung oil blazed up here and there, only fitfully to perish again.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Dennis, awed and astounded. "Old Pontifex got more than he bargained for in that bomb, or I miss my guess!"

The *Pelican* was already past the scene of the explosion. What had happened there in the fog, could not be told. Whether the enemy ship had been shattered, or whether the whaleboats had themselves caught the force of the explosion, could not be discovered. All was silence and darkness from that quarter. But from far astern, lifted a chorus of faintly quavering yells as the marooned Japs on the island discovered the loss of their boats. Save for this, all was hushed and still.

"Well, steward," said Dennis in the silence. "Let's get that grub. I need it."

"Yes, sir," responded the steward meekly.

And the *Pelican* drifted out upon the tide, swinging and heaving gently to the slow swells that rocked up through the fog. It was an hour later that the first breath of air came—the wind which, as sailors say, always comes after death.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THEY THAT TAKE THE SWORD—

A glorious sunrise broke across the ocean, lifting the island peaks to the north into a sheen of purple-rose and gold. Dennis wakened to it—he had gone to sleep stretched out upon a blanket on the quarter-deck—with a thrill of sheer delight in the golden splendour overhead; then he realized that the steward was calling him, and he leaped up.

The *Pelican* with her canvas all housed, had been but little influenced by the breeze from the north-west. She had made leeway, drifting a couple of miles from her late anchorage; having no glasses at hand, Dennis could not tell whether the Jap ship still lay by the island or not.

“There’s a boat tacking down to us, sir!” rang out the steward’s voice from forward.



Dennis glimpsed her at once, and saw that she must be a fishing-boat—a sturdy, bluff little craft which seemed to carry but two people. As he looked, he saw her brown canvas flutter down; she was coming from the north-east, and when her canvas was stowed she headed directly for the *Pelican*.

"Got a motor, eh?" reflected Dennis.

He swung down the companionway and located the binoculars of the skipper. With these he returned to the deck. Caring less about the fishing-boat than about conditions at the island, he picked up the latter point first; the steward had joined him and stood waiting for disclosures.

There was no ship in sight, much to the surprise of Dennis. Nor could he make out any sign of life upon the rocky crags of the island itself. About a mile distant from the brigantine he located a boat floating bottom-side up. It was a whaleboat, and as it swung around with the seas Dennis made out the figure two painted at its bows.

"That's the boat Mr. Leman took last night, blime if it ain't!" ejaculated the steward, upon learning its number from Dennis. "Nothin' else in sight sir?"

"No—hold on!" Dennis caught something adrift toward the north end of the island. "By thunder, there's another boat—she seems to be standing out this way. There's someone aboard her; they're getting up a sail. Seems to be only two or three of them——"

"That fishin boat is 'eading this w'y, sir," broke in the steward. "Shall I pass 'er?"

"By all means," responded Dennis, and turned his glasses toward the craft.

Amazement thrilled within him—amazement, and startled unbelief. One figure aboard her was huddled over the engine amidships and could not be discerned; but in the stern, wonder of wonders, sat Florence!

There could be no mistake about it. She was heavily wrapped in fur robes, but Dennis saw her face sharply and distinctly—her pale

eager features, her brown eyes fastened upon the whaler, her fur-gloved hand upon the tiller of the boat. With a wild yell of delight Tom Dennis leaped up, waving his arms, and he saw Florence wave back response.

"It's my wife, steward—hurrah!" Dennis ran forward to aid the Cockney. "She must have come all the way from Unalaska in that boat! Here, get your line ready by the diver's ladder in the waist; it'll be an easy climb there. Great glory, what a surprise!"

"Yes, sir," returned the steward, adding: "And werry lucky hit is, sir, as she didn't get 'ere larst night!"

"You bet," said Dennis devoutly. "Thank Heaven for the fog—it must have prevented their trying to make the island!"

As the fishing craft drew in toward the whaler, Dennis recognized the man at her engine—it was the same grizzled fisherman whom he had hired to pick up Jerry. The fisherman shut off his engine and came in to

the bow to receive the line which the steward flung; the boat drew in beside the drifting *Pelican*. Florence, rising stiffly, was aided to the ladder by her bronzed helper, and a moment later Dennis held her in his arms.

"What on earth!" he exclaimed, as she broke into mingled tears and laughter. "What brought you here, dearest?"

"You, Tom!" she exclaimed. "Jerry told us that they meant to send you down in a diving-suit and—and—oh, I'm glad we're not too late! Captain Nickers has been a darling, Tom——"

Dennis shook hands with the fisherman, who grinned and eyed the ship.

"Looks kind o' fussed up, don't she?" said Nickers. "Where's everybody?"

Florence glanced around quickly. "Oh! Where are they, Tom? Quick, you must get away——"

"Take it easy," said Dennis, and pointed to the whaleboat standing down the wind toward them. "Where they are, *I* don't know!

Lots of things have happened. So you came all this way to give me warning?"

"You bet," said Nickers. "Say, Dennis, if I had a wife like you have—by gum, I'd give a million dollars! That run over here ain't no cinch for a lady, let me tell you; but she stood watch an' watch with me like an old hand—well, she's a wonder!"

"We had to," Florence laughed, flushing under the ardent words of grizzled old Nickers. "I was terribly afraid for you, Tom, and there was no one else we could get—but tell us, what's happened?"

Dennis glanced at the approaching boat and saw that she would not reach them for ten minutes. So, dispatching the steward to make ready some coffee, he gave Florence and Nickers a brief outline of the situation, making light of his own peril.

"Where the Japs are," he concluded, "I've not the faintest idea. And I can't figure out what happened last night—where Pontifex and the others went. I don't believe he



blew up the Jap ship, for I can't see any signs of wreckings except Mr. Leman's boat. Well, here's this boat coming in. What's that in her stern, Nickers?"

Having dropped his glasses in the excitement of getting Florence aboard Dennis could make out only that the approaching whaleboat was manned by three Kanakas of the *Pelican's* crew, but in her stern was a queer shapeless mass that looked strangely terrible. Across the thwarts forward lay two silent brown figures, inanimate and evidently dead. It was manifest that from this boat there was nothing to fear.

"Why, Tom!" Florence caught Dennis' arm, a wild thrill in her voice. "In the stern—it's Mrs. Pontifex."

One of the Kanakas stepped forward across the dead bodies of his two comrades and bawled for a line as the boat's sail whipped down. Nickers flung another rope, and the whaleboat came in beside the fishing craft. Then, for the first time, Mrs. Pontifex stirred

—and Dennis saw that her head was swathed in bandages.

The Kanakas, frightened and trembling at the appearance of Dennis whom they had thought dead, came aboard aiding the Missus. Their story was a ghastly one. At the first flame of blazing oil, they had opened fire upon the Jap vessel, obeying orders previously given them by the Missus. But their firing had ceased with the explosion; it had stunned them. They had wakened to find two of their number dead—and the Missus blind.

All that night they had lain rocking to the swells after vainly trying to find the *Pelican*. The Jap ship had gone. They had heard men swimming out to her from shore, and had caught the sound of oars; then her motor had started. It was very plain that the Japs had been thoroughly frightened, and after picking up their men ashore had turned and run for it.

Florence, meantime, had aided the groaning Mrs. Pontifex to get below.

To his queries, Dennis could elicit no response from the Kanakas regarding Mr. Leman or Pontifex. They had landed at dawn, but had found the island deserted. Seeing the *Pelican* to leeward, they had set out to join her, passing on the way the floating whaleboat. They identified it beyond question as Mr. Leman's boat.

The steward came up with pannikins of coffee during the talk, and now broke into the discussion.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said to Dennis, "but I think as I know what 'appened, sir."

"You do? Then out with it!"

"Like this, sir. The skipper, e' myde 'is own fusee for that 'ere bomb, and I seen 'im a-myking of it. 'E rolled it wet, sir, but 'e myde it in the hafternoon, sir, and before 'e come to use it larst night, the bloody fussee 'ad dried out, sir. So when 'e lighted it, why, it wasn't no fusee at all, but a reg'lar train o' powder, sir——"

Dennis turned away, sickened by the

thought of what must have happened. The explosion must have taken place almost instantly—no wonder Mr. Leman's boat was floating bottom upward! Pontifex and Ericksen and Corny and the others—all gone!

"Well," said Nickers phlegmatically, sipping his hot coffee, "all I got to say, looks like old Pontifex got what he was fixing to give other folks. Hey?"

Dennis nodded and left the spot. Getting coffee and biscuits from the steward, he went to the after companionway; but at the top of the ladder he encountered Florence coming up alone.

"I'll take this to Mrs. Pontifex——"

"No use, Tom," Florence stopped him, her face very pale. "Poor thing, she can't eat yet; Tom, she broke down in my arms—oh, I can't talk of it! The poor woman——"

Dennis forced a draught of coffee upon her, and Florence swallowed the hot liquid. It

sent a glow of colour into her pale cheeks.

"So she's broken, eh?" mused Dennis. "Poor thing—one can't help but feel sorry for her, Florence, and yet in a way she deserved all that has happened. Look here, what are we going to do? About ourselves, I mean, and this ship, and the salvage."

He briefly explained what must have happened to Pontifex and Mr. Leman, glossing over the event as much as possible. But Florence seemed not to hear. She stood at the rail, gazing out at the purple peaks to the north for a long while. Suddenly she turned back to him, a faint smile upon her lips.

"Tom, the first thing will be to straighten everything out at Unalaska! Before I left, I told the authorities everything. They're trying to get the revenue cutter, but we shan't need her now, of course.

"We can charter this ship from Mrs. Pontifex—it'll give the poor woman some money to go on—for a share in the proceeds of the salvage. Then we can come back and



clear up everything in father's old ship——”

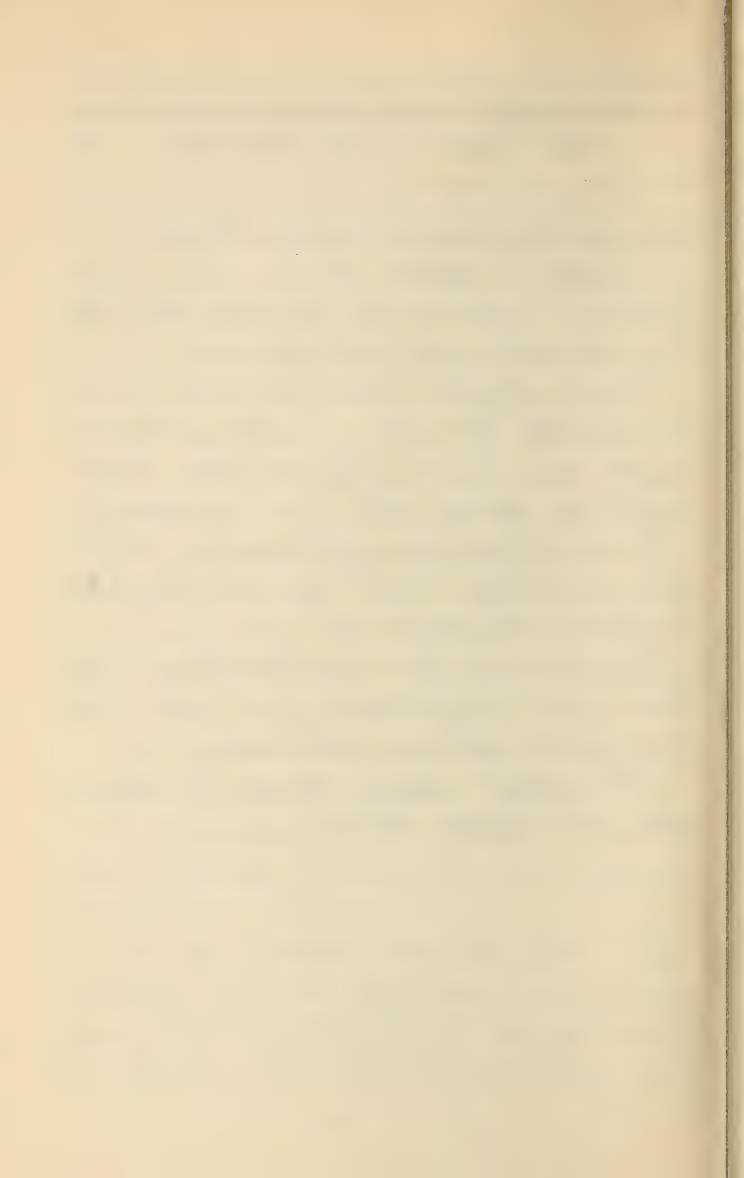
“Agreed.” Dennis turned. “Oh, Cap'n Nickers! Think we can take this craft into Unalaska with what hands we have?”

“Reckon we can,” floated back the voice of the grizzled fisherman. “I got a Master's ticket, and if I can't lay a course there's something wrong with the Gov'ment!”

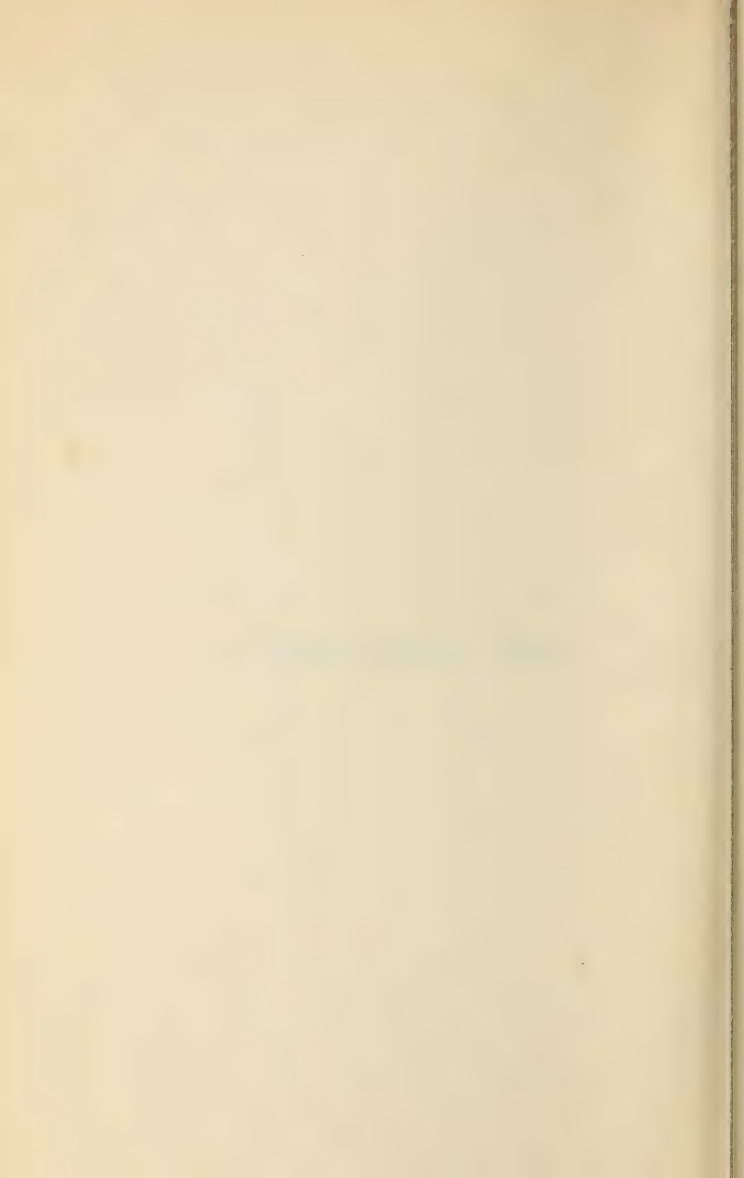
Dennis looked eagerly to Florence. “We'll make him skipper—eh? And we'll give him a share in the profits, too——”

Her arms crept about his shoulders. “Oh, Tom—we'll do *everything*, won't we? But you'll never leave me behind again.”

“Not much!” Dennis pressed his lips to hers, and laughed softly.



## THE CONCLUSION



## THE CONCLUSION

### OUTWARD BOUND

Four months after Tom Dennis had vanished from Marshville, the dingy and shut-up office of *The Clarion* was reopened. Dennis had returned—and he had not returned alone.

The mortgage held by banker Dribble was cancelled. A new linotype machine was installed in *The Clarion's* dingy back room. The first issue of the paper announced that it was back again to stay. And it stayed!

Also, some very good farms along the river were purchased by a gentleman named Nickers. Mr. Nickers announced that he was a retired sea-captain and was now about to take up the profession of farming Mother Earth—the dream of every sea-faring man alive.



Each afternoon at five minutes of two, Mr. Nickers would stride down the street and enter the office of *The Clarion*. The wide front office was now divided into two rooms. Mr. Nickers invariably passed to the second room and entered, closing the door behind him.

One afternoon, however, he came slightly earlier than usual. Tom Dennis, who was in the second room, shook hands heartily. In the corner by the window that overlooked Main Street sat a man of huge physique and massive features; this man was able to move only with difficulty and by aid of a stick. Miles Hathaway would never be the man he had been, but at least he could get about. Modern surgeons can do much that appears miraculous to the layman.

Hathaway held up his big fist and exchanged a hearty grip with Nickers; then he lifted a rugged booming voice in a shout that rattled the plate-glass window.

"Jerry! Where's that— Oh, here you are!"

"Yes, sir," meekly responded a moon-faced lad, popping in at the door. He was clad in printer's apron and had a very dirty face, as is the rightful heritage of every printer's devil who is yet passing through the "type lice" jest of hoary memory. But he was manifestly a very happy boy.

"Strike four bells!" roared Miles Hathaway. "And fetch my pipe and tobacco."

Dennis beckoned to Jerry and whispered something. The boy struck a brass ship's bell of the regulation eight-inch size which hung near the door—struck it one-two, one-two, as a ship's bell should be struck, then vanished hastily. He had barely gone when Florence came into the room, with a smile and a kiss for everybody concerned—which seemed to mightily embarrass Captain Nickers but not to displease him particularly!

Florence started to speak, then halted as Jerry re-entered the room bearing a tray with glasses and a long green bottle.

"Why, Tom!" she exclaimed quickly. "You're not drinking?"

"We're all drinking to-day—and you'll have to take a sip at least!" said Dennis, laughing. He produced a corkscrew and opened the bottle. "News for you, Florence! Now, Jerry, fill 'em all around—and a specially big one for Cap'n Nickers!"

Wondering, Florence watched Jerry obey the order. Then Tom Dennis, lifting his glass, met her puzzled eyes with a gay laugh.

"Good news, Florence! Two things have happened this morning. First, the other paper has offered to sell out to us—and I'm going to accept their offer, running it as a weekly from now on. That means no opposition here. And second, I've signed a whopping advertising contract with one of the biggest agencies—it came in the mail

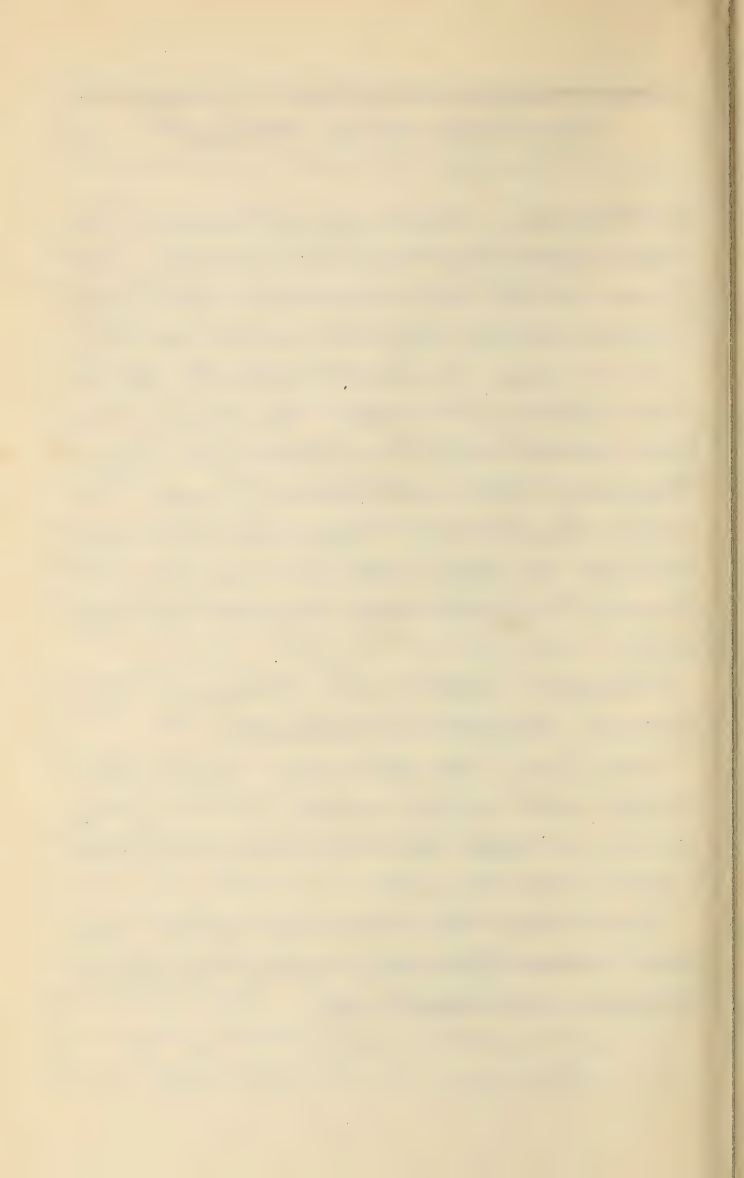
this morning. Ladies and gentlemen, that means that from this time forward *The Clarion* is not only established firmly here in town, but she begins to haul in the coin!

"I've made mistakes," pursued Dennis more soberly. "I made 'em when I was here before, and I've profited by them. Beginning with next Monday's issue *The Clarion* dies for ever! Beginning with next Monday its place will be taken by *The Marshville Pelican*—and here's to the new ship!"

"Hurrray!" said Cap'n Nickers. But Florence turned to her husband.

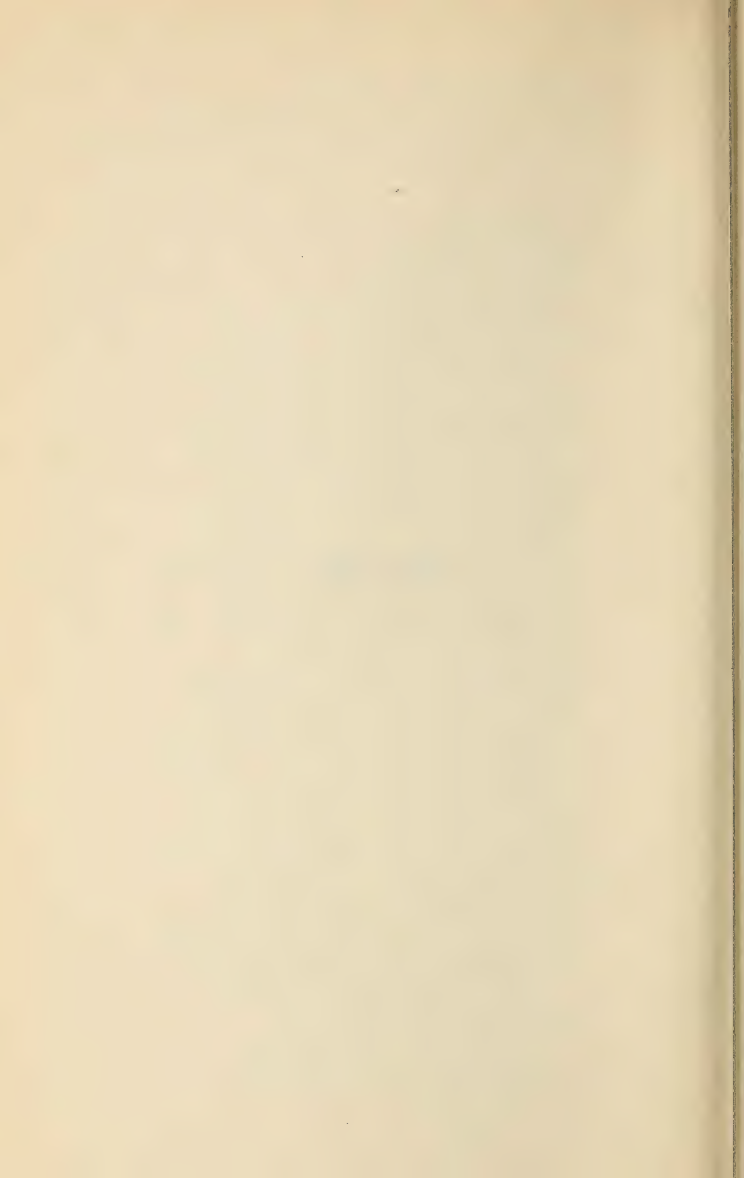
"And Tom," she said softly, "you'll have to find a new society editor. I—I'm going to stay at home after this and—and make a real home for you!"

Of all those who heard her words Tom Dennis alone understood—and perhaps Miles Hathaway understood also.

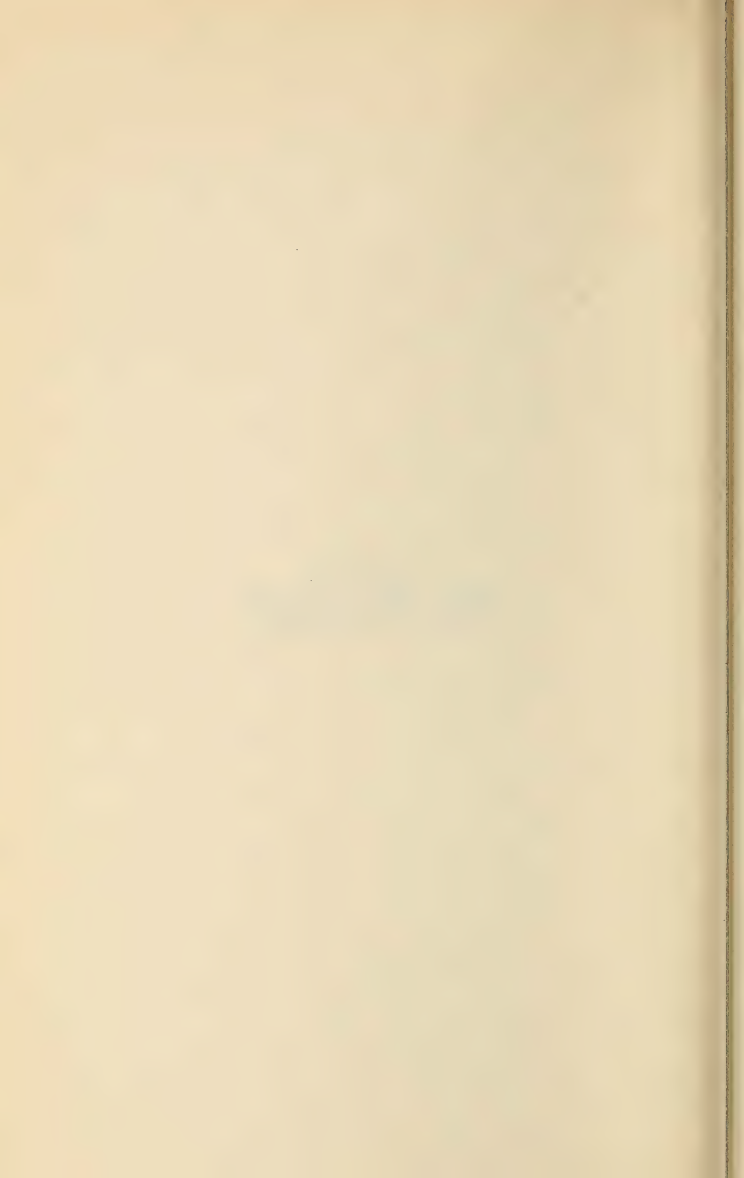




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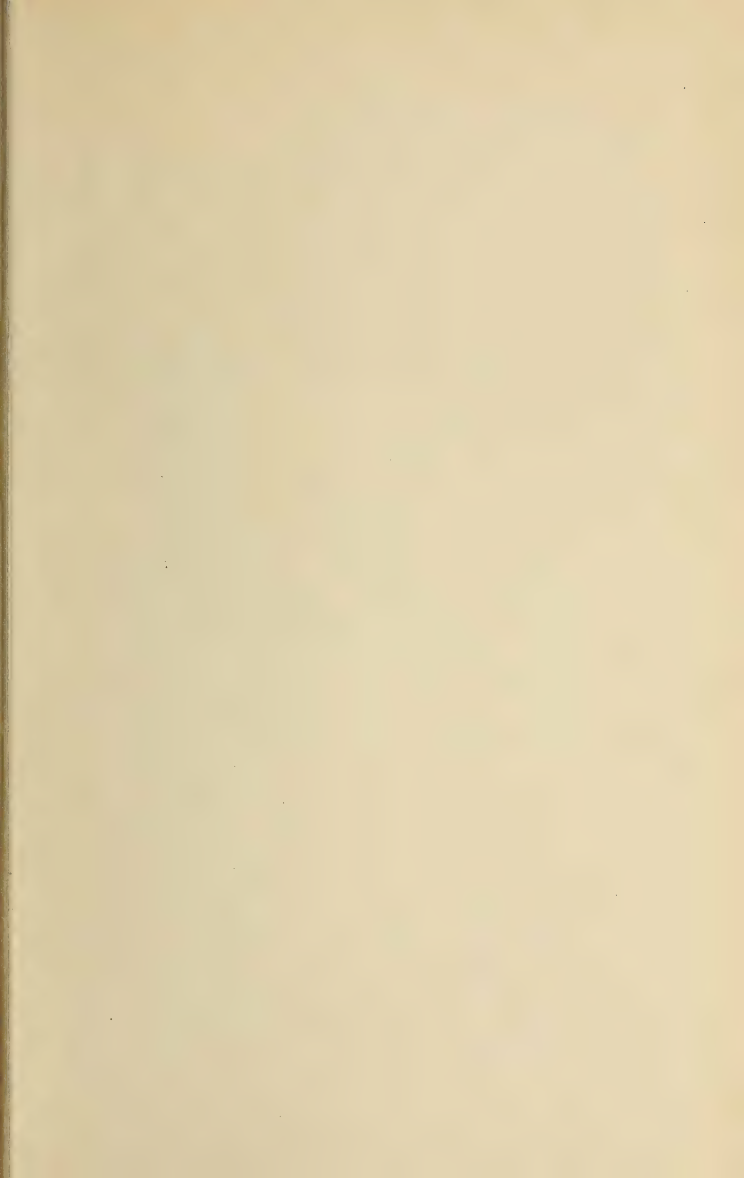
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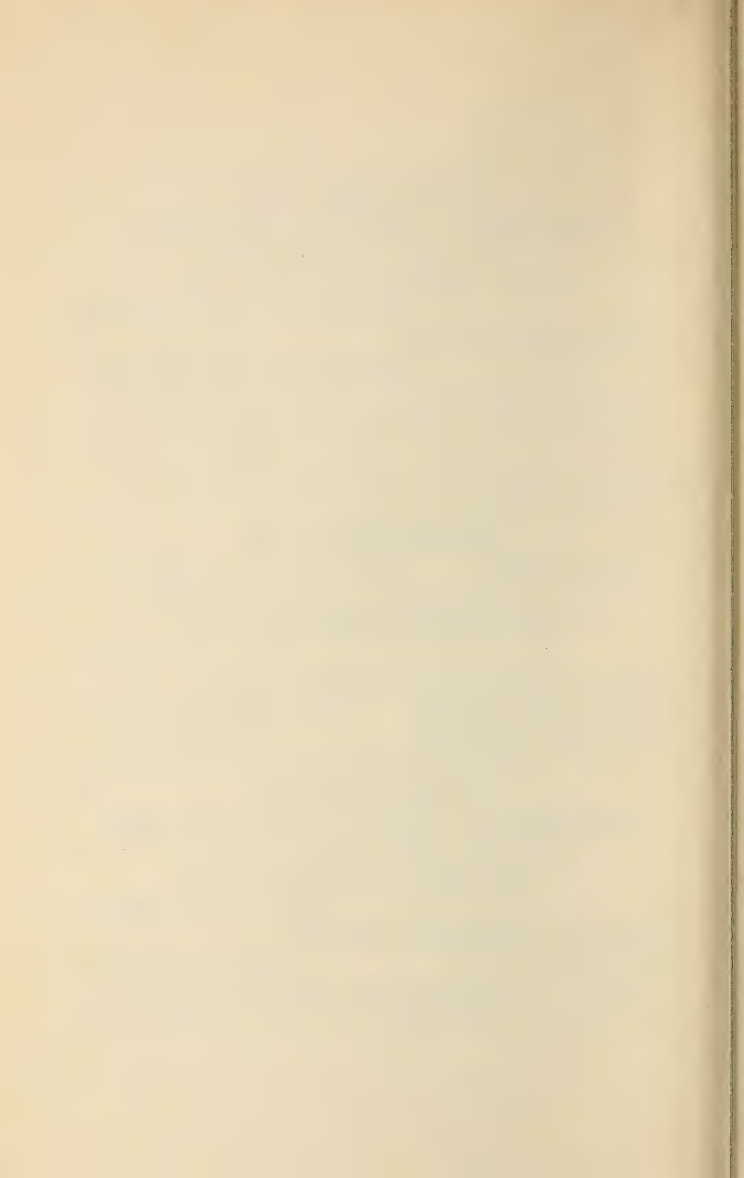
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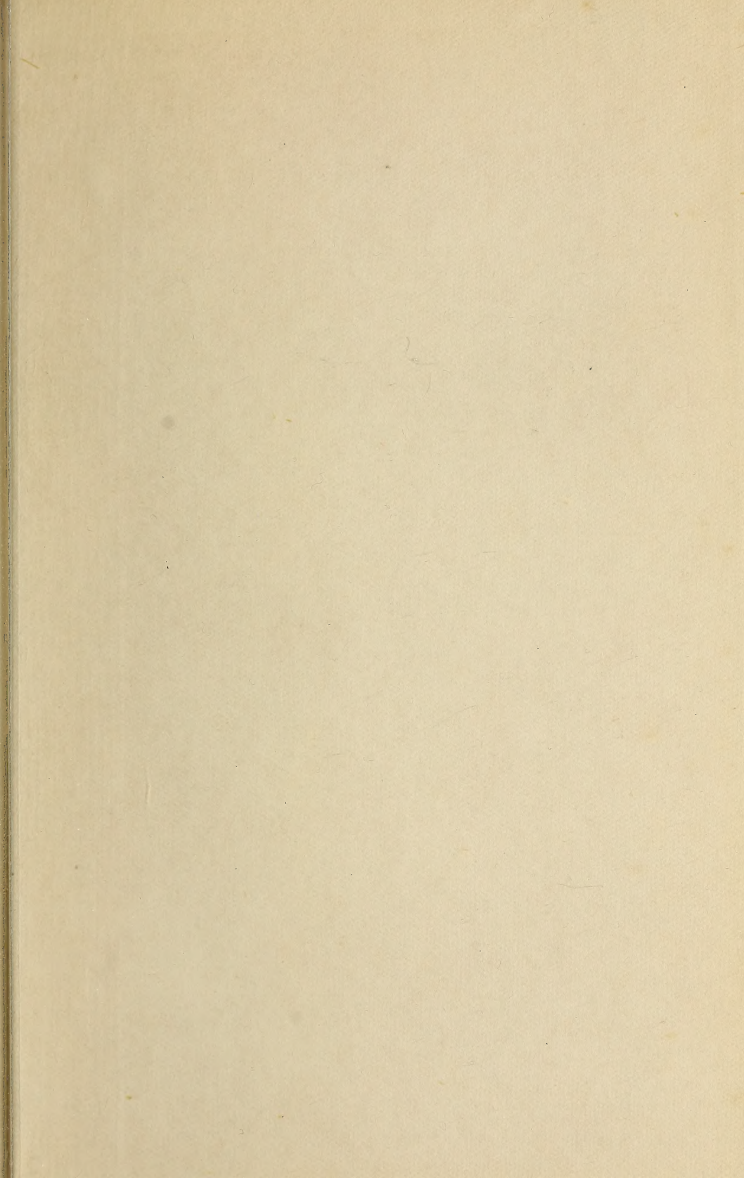
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